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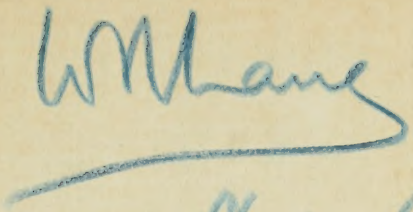

# THE MARNE—AND AFTER

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LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM R. ROBERTSON

396m

# The Marne—and After

*A Companion Volume to "The Retreat from Mons"*

BY

A. CORBETT-SMITH

(*Major R.F.A.*)

WITH PLATES AND MAPS

*Awake remembrance of these valiant dead,*
*And with your puissant arm renew their feats:*
*You are their heir.*

201922
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CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1917

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To
The Immortal Memory
of
The Men of the Old Army
who
Saved England,
August—November, 1914.

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# PROLOGUE

## THE MEN OF MONS

*WHO shall sing the Song of them,*
*The wonder and the strength of them,*
*The gaiety and tenderness*
*They bore across the sea?*
*In every heart's the Song of them,*
*The debt that England owes to them,*
*The chivalry and fearlessness*
*That strove—and won Her free.*

Merrily aboard at Southampton Quay
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together),
Southerly away to the dip of the sea—
(Hey! for a holiday in August weather)
Far to the north the grey ships ride,
But abeam steals a T.B.D. for a guide
'Till they're safely along the French quay-side—
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together).

Cheerily ashore by Rouen Quay
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together),
As proudly welcoming France flings free
Her gates, aglow in the golden weather.
"God speed!" rings the cry: and with melodies gay
Echoing down the flower-strewn way,
Blithesome as children sped to their play
Go the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.

On to the drab-grey Belgian land,
With jingle of steel and creak of leather,
Swings into line the jocund band
Of Horse and Guns and Foot together.
Away in advance an outpost screen
Of Chetwode's Cavalry intervene ;
While flushed with pride, or coldly serene
The marshalling armies press together.

And now while bells yet knoll to prayer,
Or ever the Host is raised on high,
A sterner summons blasts the air
In dread presage that Death is nigh.
Swift overhead in an endless stream
With ghastly wailing the great shells scream,
To plunge the world in a hideous dream
Of murderous carnage and misery.

Hour after hour the raging storm
Crashes o'er Guns and Foot together ;
Hour upon hour the ranks re-form—
(Hey ! what a game for the holiday weather !)
Out to the flanks the Horse press home
Charge after charge—as the sea-waves comb
And lash the cliffs in eddying foam—
(So work Guns, Foot and Horse together).

Lurid in flame falls the August night
(Shattered the trench and battered the gun),
Yet hurled in vain is the German might,
Scarce a yard of the ground is won.
But harsh is the Fate which aid assigns
To the enemy ranks as his power declines,
And cleaves a road through the stern-held lines
Ere the pale mists rise to the morning sun.

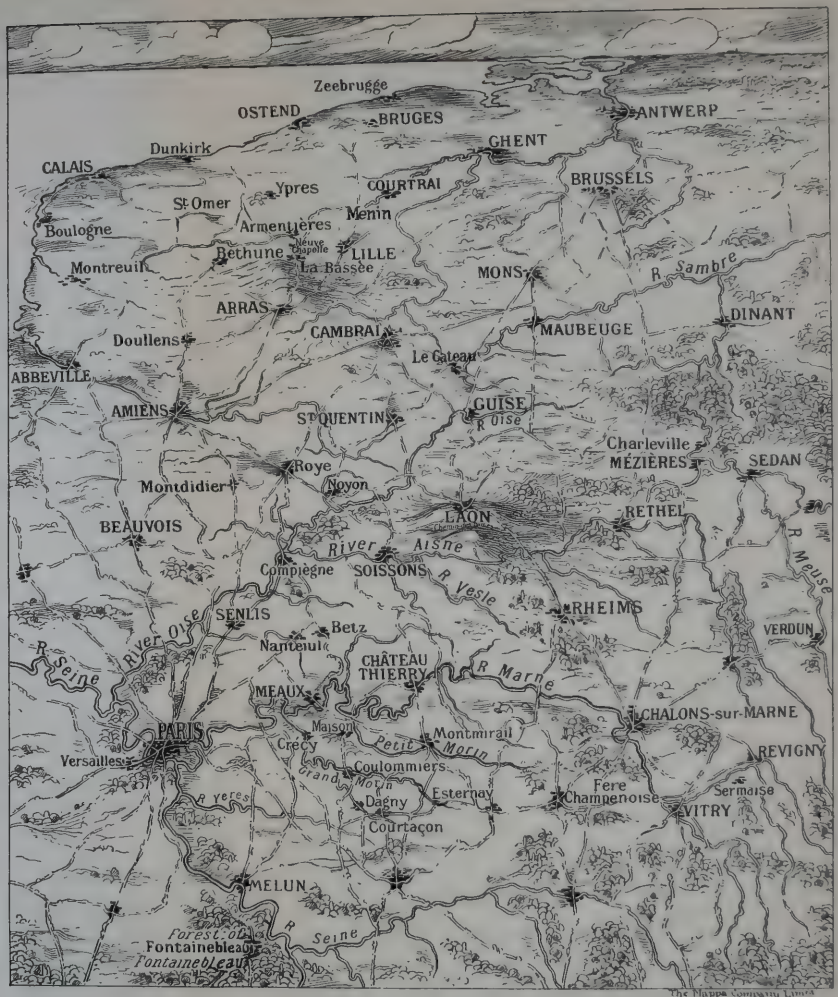
Blinded, bloody, and torn, they reel
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together)
Back from the line of glinting steel
They have held through the hours of holiday weather.
Yet hearts beat high, though hands may clench
In the sinister whisper, "Betrayed—by the French?"
As wistful they turn from the derelict trench
The Horse, Foot and Guns have held together.

So it's Southward Ho! for the land of France,
Through the shimmering haze of the August weather;
"And it's we who'll pipe for a merry, mad dance,"
Say the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.
"With our slim little rifles," the Infantry cry.
"We've shells," call the Gunners, "to darken the sky";
"While sabre and lance we gaily will ply,"
Sing the Horse as they caper in highest feather.

* * * *

"They're five to one—but we've piped the tune
Through the blazing hours of the August weather;
It's time to go—maybe none too soon,"
Whisper Horse and Guns and Foot together.
But none would be first to steal away
From the dance they have piped through the summer day;
"'Tis *we*," cry all, "who've the right to stay"—
All the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.

Staggering back down the roads they come
(The Horse and the Guns and the Foot together),
And it's hey! for a whistle and a little toy drum
To cheer us along through the August weather!
Thrashed into rags are the uniforms neat;
Blood-soaked puttees to wrap round the feet;
"God! What a game, this merry retreat!"
Cry the Horse and the Guns and the Foot together.




The Mappa Company Limited

MAP OF COUNTRY FROM ANTWERP TO THE SEINE

# The Marne—and After

## I

### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

K. Hen. *We doubt not of a fair and lucky war,*
*. . . We doubt not now*
*But every rub is smoothed on our way.*
*Then forth, dear countrymen: let us deliver*
*Our puissance into the hand of God,*
*Putting it straight in expedition.*[1]

"Didn't I tell you we'd be home by Christmas!" and Sergeant Smart threw a leg triumphantly across the pommel of his saddle and came heavily to ground. (It wasn't the proper way to dismount, but Smart evidently meant to emphasise the finality of his remark.)

"Throw them leaders off to the left a bit," he ordered, "and give them Frenchies behind room to pass."

The lead-driver looked over his shoulder and promptly began to pull across to the right.

"Left, I said," bawled the sergeant.

[1] The quotation headings throughout the volume are again taken exclusively from Shakespeare's *Henry V.*

The lead-driver evidently didn't hear, for he continued to pull in the wrong direction as a squadron of French cavalry trotted smartly by in half-sections, greeted with a volley of cheers all down the battery.

Sergeant Smart wisely decided to drop the intricate subject of "rule of the road" in outlandish countries like France, and returned to his first argument as two of his pals joined him. The battery was halting for half-an-hour to water the horses after a hard four hours' stretch —in the right direction.

"You mark my words," said Sergeant Smart with an air of absolute conviction, "at the rate we're going we'll have the Allemons back over their old Rhine before the month's out. And they won't half be sorry they took this job on."

"Bit sanguine, aren't you?" remarked the senior subaltern who was passing and overheard the last words.

"Sanguine, sir? What, after what the General said? Last night's order, sir?"

"No, what was it? I haven't heard," said the senior sub.

"Why, he said—don't remember the exact words—that if all went well he expected to have the German Army scuppered in three days; that it was just up to us to carry out the job." And Sergeant Smart surveyed his audi-

ence with a put-that-in-your-pipe-and-smoke-it air that was irresistibly comic.

"Well, you'd better see that you get a new pair of riding pants before you cross the Rhine," said the senior sub. with a smile, "or the German ladies will all be laughing at you." And he went on up the line to report to the major.

"Will have his little joke," said the sergeant, twisting himself round to see the hole through which the breeze was blowing. "And if it comes to that, Mr. Stanion could do with another pair of boots himself."

"It's a treat to see some of those French chaps at last," a corporal remarked. "Can't think what the hell they've been up to all this time."

"Rummy lot, ain't they, them cavalry coves?" the wheel-driver put in. "Wot d'yer think 'o them tin belly-plates o' theirs, Sergeant? Fat lot o' use ahrt 'ere, I don't think."

"All watered, Sergeant Smart?" a voice rang out.

"All watered, sir."

"Bit up, then, and get mounted."

The senior subaltern salutes the C.O. "Battery all watered and ready, sir."

A minute later and they're off once again at a steady trot in the hope of getting in a

few rounds at the retreating Huns before nightfall.

* * * * *

Yes, "by the mass" their "hearts were in the trim." Never did an army, harried and hunted for ten interminable days and nights, battered by incredible weight of shell-fire, marching and fighting, dropping through sheer physical exhaustion, staggering up and on again to face and crush some new attack every hour —never did an army turn at last upon its pursuers with such gaiety of spirits in the unconquerable conviction that the fullness of triumph was theirs for the taking.

Once again it was the ingrained spirit of English race and blood. History is full of instances of it. Never to know when you are beaten. By all the rules of war and human disposition those five Infantry Divisions,[1] with a Cavalry Division, had been put out of action more than a week before. So indeed von Kluck believed, or he would not have made the vital mistake he did.[2]

But the gist of the matter was this, and it

[1] Through the common use of the expression "the First Seven Divisions," the public have come to imagine that these divisions formed the original Expeditionary Force. This misnomer is regrettable. The original Force consisted of one Cavalry and four Infantry Divisions. A fifth Division came into line for the battle of Le Cateau, August 26th, 1914, the sixth at the Aisne, and the seventh in Flanders.

[2] *Vide* "The Retreat from Mons," p. 227.

is difficult to understand when we remember the terrible time through which the Force had passed. The men, or a large proportion of them, had seen how again and again they had beaten down heavy enemy attacks. They knew themselves to be the better men, and it was therefore incomprehensible to them why they were always receiving the order to retire. The prevalent feeling was tersely expressed in the remark I have quoted in the earlier volume. "Where the 'ell are we going? and why the ——are we retreating? Give 'em socks, didn't we?"

In short, the Force had not been fighting as a forlorn hope, with its back to the wall, as it were, but as a victorious army confident in its ability to advance at any moment and fretting at the unreasonable delay in the passing of the word.

Now that the actual facts of the Retreat are known this state of mind seems incredible. When we recall the overwhelming superiority of the enemy in men and material, and the perfect detail of their preparation and organisation, it is indeed a miracle that any part of the British Force escaped to tell the tale. And yet all the time our men thought that they were the victors. I do not attempt to explain it, I can only just state the fact.

There was, too, another factor which seems

worthy of mention, for it explains in some degree the difference of outlook between our men and our French Allies in those early days. The French had unforgettable memories of the German invasion of 1870. These, together with subsequent incidents like the Prussian demand, duly enforced, for the dismissal from office of Delcassé the French Foreign Minister, had gradually tended to a belief in the invincibility of Prussian arms. As we remember, this belief was carefully fostered throughout Europe, so that it was not only the French people who were a party to it. And when you are separated from a military menace like that only by the width of a road, and can see for yourselves what it looks like, it is not to to be wondered at that the French National Army had a very wholesome dread of its effects.

It was with vastly different feelings that the little professional Army of Britain took the field. For them the might of Germany meant nothing. It was not even a bogey with a turnip head. That it would be a very real and a very stern fight our officers fully realised. But then the professional Army, which is always at work somewhere or other on the confines of Empire, is well used to hard knocks. And so they went into this fight, too, simply because it was their job and, so far as this new army

was concerned, with the belief that the foeman would probably prove worthy of their steel. That was all. I suppose there was hardly a man in the Force who properly appreciated the reasons for the War. That came later, together with evidence of the hellish methods of the Hun.

So it came about that for one reason and another the British Force had to withstand the main shock of the German invasion. How our two Army Corps did so, and how, under God's hand, the victory of the Marne was made possible I have already told. The task, a wholly unexpected one, of our Army was, for the moment, fulfilled. It became now the turn of our French Allies. And it was our French Allies who won the Battle of the Marne. The British played their part right valiantly, but, from the nature of the contest, it was only a comparatively small part which could be allotted to them. The marvel is that they were in such fine fettle that they could play it at all. And that is where von Kluck miscalculated.

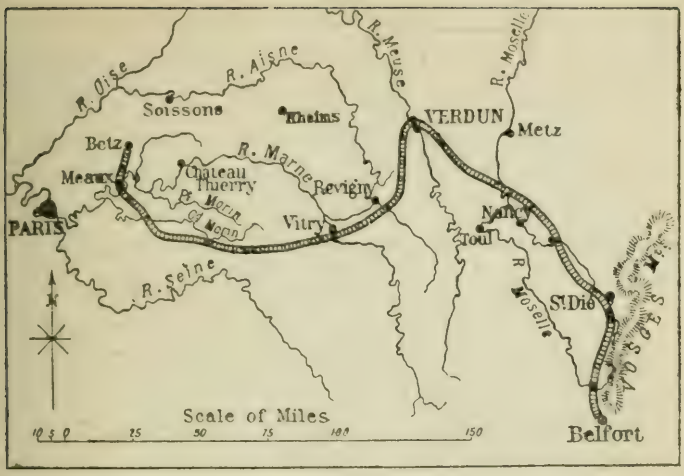
Most people find it extremely difficult to understand just how the tide turned during those critical days. And it is difficult. But as just now we are all soldiers at heart, women as well as men, and as the Marne is one of the decisive battles of the world in which we are all concerned, it is worth giving it a few minutes'

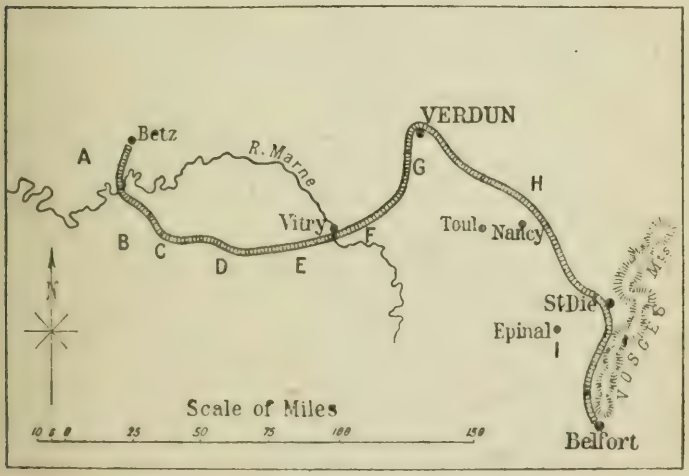
study. I will outline the main facts as shortly and concisely as I can.

On the opposite page is a plan to show the Franco-British line on the eve of the advance, and below it is another to indicate roughly how the various Armies were distributed.

*6th French Army.* Perhaps the first thing you will notice is the appearance of a new French Army on the extreme left, where, up to now, there had only been brigades and occasional troops. This was the 6th French Army. But it was new only in the sense of its appearance in that position. As a matter of fact, this force, consisting of rather more than four divisions, had already suffered severely in the previous fighting in the east. We see it in position on the eve of the advance not as a strong fighting force in itself destined to turn the enemy flank, but rather as the nucleus upon which will shortly be concentrated a succession of reinforcements.

Most of these reinforcements were coming from the south of Paris, and history may probably know them as the "taxi-cab army." The story of how motor-buses, taxi-cabs and every possible vehicle were commandeered to rush the troops across Paris to the battle-front is well known. They came into position, division by division, at various times on September 6, 7, and 8. The actual French attack from




## REFERENCE.

*N.B.—The letters indicate the approximate centres of the several positions.*

A. VIth French Army (General Manoury). B. British Force. C. A Cavalry Corps of Vth French Army (General Conneau). D. Vth French Army (General D'Esperey). E. VIIth (or IXth) French Army (General Foch). F. IVth French Army (General de Cary). G. IIIrd French Army (General Sarrail). H. IInd French Army (General de Castelnau). I. Ist French Army (General Dubail).

this quarter on the German right was begun about mid-day on September 5, 1914, and the main idea was the attempted cutting of von Kluck's line of communications back through Belgium and the outflanking and rolling up of his army on the west, just as he had tried to outflank the British during the Retreat.

*British.* Still looking at the Plan, and moving from west to east, we next come to our own army. They had crossed the stream of the Grand Morin, a tributary of the Marne, and had halted with the Forest of Crécy between them and the enemy. German cavalry and advance guards were still moving towards them from the north across the Marne.

At this time the British losses had not yet been made good, although a welcome reinforcement of about 2,000 men had just joined the Second Corps. These losses, up to September 7, were put at 589 officers and 18,140 N.C.O.'s and men, or a number not very far below one quarter of the strength of the Force when it came into action only a fortnight before. The Second Corps alone had lost 350 officers and 9,200 men, or more than a quarter of its original strength.

In equipment, entrenching tools and so forth, we were rather badly off. During the Retreat men had discarded pretty well everything they carried except their rifles. Great-

coats and packs were pitched aside during the first couple of days, and what was then left in the way of tools was lost at Le Cateau. The principal base, too, had been moved from Havre to St. Nazaire, and as the line of communication had not yet been properly re-established it was impossible for the moment to get up new supplies.

But the Army Service Corps was putting in some of the finest work that corps has ever done. And only those who saw a little of its organisation from the inside could realise the enormous difficulties which officers and men had then to surmount. Food and ammunition were the only two things to bother about in those early days, and somehow or other the goods were delivered. The man at the head of that department of the Army's work, the cool and calculating brain which foresaw every contingency and instantly grasped the best way to meet it, this was Sir William Robertson, Quarter-Master-General. No more need be said. And his right hand man was Colonel C. M. Mathew, an officer who had seen most of the fighting there was to be seen on the confines of the Empire since 1884, and as cheery and lovable a man as any in the Force.

*French Armies.*—Immediately on the British right, and bridging the gap to the 5th French Army, came a French cavalry corps

under General Conneau. Then came the 5th Army, the 7th Army (or 9th), and in succession the 4th, 3rd, 2nd and 1st.

*Numbers.* As regards the numbers of the opposing forces along that 300-mile battle-front, it is not easy to give even an approximate estimate. We have a fair idea of the strength of the Franco-British line, but we can only guess rather wildly at the numbers of the enemy. No one has made more carefully reasoned calculations of such figures than Mr. Hilaire Belloc, and his estimate is that the Germans numbered at least 75 Divisions, as against 51 or 52 Franco-British (46 French, 6 British). We may place the Franco-British strength at about 700,000 men.[1]

These figures, together with the Plan, will, I hope, serve to explain the remark that the British could only play a comparatively small part in the great battle or battles of the Marne. I will now, without discussing strategy or tactics, summarise under three heads how the fighting went:

(1). *East.* An exceedingly heavy German attack was being directed from the north against the line Verdun-Toul-Epinal,

[1] For those who may wish to study in fuller detail the numbers and composition of the Armies, reference is suggested to "A General Sketch of the War—Second Phase," by Hilaire Belloc and Major Whitton's "The Marne Campaign."

and particularly against the centre and the town of Nancy. The importance to the enemy of success at this point may be gauged from the presence there of the German Emperor. Here, after delivering the usual address to his troops, he had dressed himself with more than his usual care, and, surrounded by the usual glittering staff, stood waiting to make his triumphal entry into Nancy.

This attack actually began about September 1. It reached its climax just when General Joffre ordered the advance along the Allied line. The French, with far inferior numbers, held and repulsed the attack with a German loss estimated at about 120,000 men—and the German Emperor decided to see for himself how things were going on in East Prussia.

(2). *West.* Von Kluck had swerved S.E. in his advance towards Paris. Apparently he thought that the Allied left (the British and 5th French Army) would crumble before his outflanking attack, and that the 6th Army on his right was not worth bothering about.

As already noted the 6th French Army was being built up to try an outflanking scheme upon the German right. Suddenly, then, appeared to von Kluck

this new menace. To meet it he began to withdraw troops from his left (opposing the British). Joffre ordered a general counter-offensive; the 6th Army began their outflanking movement, and the British and 5th Army turned to advance.

The weight of this counter-attack induced the Germans to strengthen their right at the expense of their centre, and

(3). *The Centre* was broken into by General Foch and his divisions. A gap was discovered in the German line, the French poured in, and by a brilliant stroke the Battle of the Marne was won. The Germans had to retreat all along the line.[1]

There you have the barest possible outline of this great battle. Nor do I even hint at the sternness of the fighting, how the French were at times driven back, clung limpet-like to new positions, rallied and thrust the invaders back once more. To our Allies it was now or never. The decisive stroke, one of the most brilliant and effective coups-de-main in military history, was not actually delivered until the late afternoon of Wednesday, September 9. The

[1] It is not improbable that official histories may considerably modify this theory. The other theory, ably supported by Major Whitton in his book, is that the leading part in winning the battle was really played by General Manoury and his Army on the west. We must wait for the official statement.

story of it, whichever version is correct, is still to be told as it should be. And if Englishmen are not particularly happy in remembering foreign names, let us at least remember and hold in the highest honour the names of Generals Foch and Manoury.

* * * * *

It was late in the evening of Saturday, September 5, that the orders got round that at last we were to advance as part of a general offensive. That evening Generals Smith-Dorrien and Haig visited many units of their respective commands, and if there was any shadow of a lingering doubt in the minds of the G.O.C.'s as to the condition and keenness of the men, that visit finally dispelled it. By good fortune, too, the day had been a complete rest for nearly everyone, and that had worked wonders. Thomas Atkins does like to start his job properly washed and shaved. And I well remember a General Officer making a sudden appearance amongst a platoon of a certain famous county regiment.

"Tshun," yelled a lance-corporal.

Out came the heads covered with soap-suds before the General had time to stop them.

"Go on, men," said the General, "but you will be glad to hear that we're going to advance to-morrow." And with a salute and a smile he passed on.

There was a moment's pause, and then with a yell up into the air went the buckets of soapy water, deluging everyone near by. The men rushed back to their lines, vigorously rubbing their heads dry, to spread the good news.

That was how the lads felt about it.

"I call upon the British Army in France to show now to the enemy its power," said Sir John French in his Order of the Day, "and to push on vigorously to the attack beside the 6th French Army."

Away to the south, through the dim, misty glades of the Forest of Crécy before ever the sun is up, there is a great stirring of marching men. Here and there and on the flanks batteries of field-guns are pushing along hard, for they have some lee-way to make up. Close up with the cavalry screens you will find the Horse Gunners. Their moment, too, is at hand. Years ago the German Kaiser and his Staff recognised them as the finest body of troops in the world; he has seen what they can do in a retirement (L Battery is not forgotten), now he and his merry men shall see what they can do now that the advance is sounded. Yes, it is good to feel that it is the right direction at last.

Back to the riverside town of Melun, where G.H.Q. has its habitation, runs the wireless current of sympathy. Père Joffre has just paid

a visit. "Ça va bien maintenant, n'est ce pas?" "Mais oui, ça marche!" G.H.Q. has done a deal of packing and unpacking these last days. And they are men of few words those red-tabbed, brass-hatted ones. But this time—*ça marche!* Once again a procession of lordly motor-cars takes the dusty roads and the *mairie* is left empty. The townsfolk are sorry to see them go. *Mais si polis, ces anglais!*

Still farther south and we come to our old friends the motor lorries. Right down to Fontainebleau they have displayed Mr. Johnnie Walker and his eyeglass, Mr. Pulltite and his corsets, Mr. Mayflower and his margarine before an enthusiastic country folk. The colours are not so brilliant as they were a month ago. Some of the pictures, too, are chipped by bullet marks, but Mr. Walker smiles serenely as of old, and brings a feeling of peace to our excitable French friends.

Here, too, the rumour comes that the tide has turned. The lorries fill up to their capacity with shells, a last hurried overhauling of parts, and they, too, are reversed for the north. *Tout ça marche!*

At dawn on Sunday, September 6, the battle opened. The tide had turned.

## II

### WITH THE CAVALRY

CHOR. *Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them*
*Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;*
*For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,*
*Carry them here and there.*

PICTURE to yourselves our own fair county of Kent; enlarge the picture as you would a photograph, and you will see a little of this fragrant countryside of France through which our men are now advancing.

A land rich in orchards, where heavy branches dip down to lazy streams and tell a double harvest of their glowing fruit. A land of yellowing corn, through which, like wind-tracks, run the straight, poplar-lined roads, rising and bending to the gentle hills. A land of tiny towns and sleepy hamlets, of noble châteaux glimmering white against the sky, of tiled cottages and thatched barns dimly seen against the blue dusk of the woodlands.

Into this fair land have the Huns carried their fire and rapine. But thus far and no farther. Along the banks of the little river of the Grand Morin ran the line of their southern-

most bivouacs that eve of the Allied advance. And ever in touch with them our own cavalry patrols are now beginning to drive them back. De Lisle is out there with his 9th Lancers, 4th Dragoon Guards and 18th Hussars. Hubert Gough, too, with the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades.

That first day there was comparatively little fighting, at least on any big scale. The French were pushing ahead pretty fast and seemed to be doing most of the work. With us it was more an affair of outposts, in which the cavalry were more particularly engaged. Little disputes over the passage of a stream, the clearing of a cluster of barns, a squadron charge upon a spitting machine-gun, and so on.

Typical of this fighting was a trifling affair near Pezarches. A squadron of Lancers was working in advance of a section of Horse Gunners when their scouts were suddenly fired upon from behind a hedgerow which ran across some farm buildings. Two of ours were hit, one in the arm, one in the leg. The four advance scouts, who were dismounted, at once began to fall back upon the main body, firing as they retired.

In the meantime the C.O. dismounted half his troop and lined a parallel hedge to pour in a hot return fire. The other half-troop worked round under cover of a wood to try to get the enemy on the flank.

The enemy fire seemed to slacken, and some of the Germans were seen making for their horses.

"They're bolting! Come on, boys," and the subaltern was in his saddle and over the low hedge with his men after him in less time than it takes to tell.

But half way across the open a couple of machine-guns opened fire straight in front. The subaltern mixed up a curse with a prayer that the other half-troop would get round in time and held straight ahead.

Over the next hedge and the subaltern launched straight into the middle of a litter of astonished pigs. Down came the horse and two piglets had all the breath knocked out of them. It was rather inglorious, but they certainly saved the officer's life. Before he could get up his half-troop were in amongst the few remaining enemy troopers, while the machine-guns went on spitting death into friend and foe alike.

Now the Gunner subaltern had grasped what was happening, and it looked rather serious; nor could he see how he was to lend a hand. Anyway, he decided to trek after the second half-troop. Round the wood the section went at a canter just as the troop was clear and lining up to charge. And then Lancers and Gunners in those breathless seconds could tell what they were up against.

It was a regular little tactical trick of the Germans. A handful of cavalry would form a screen, and working up behind would come a couple, say, of fast motor lorries, each carrying 40 odd men, Jaegers generally, and a couple of machine-guns. The cavalry would hold the line while the infantry deployed, and would then slip away, unmasking the machine-guns. But in this case the enemy evidently had not noticed our flanking movement.

"Mine, I think!" said the Gunner subaltern.

You have to make up your mind pretty quickly in a case like that, and the guns swept out into the open without a check of the pace. A sudden wheel. Then, "Halt, action front!" and an admirably placed shell informed the Huns that the game was not to be so one-sided after all. Before six rounds had been fired two of the machine-guns were out of action and the Lancers charged, while the gunners turned their attention to the motor lorries. One lorry got away; the other didn't. And a quarter of an hour later one of the first batches of Huns was on its way to comfortable quarters in England.

The whole affair had lasted about a quarter of an hour, and the dear old lady who owned the farm looked on all the while from an upper window, as though it were a stage play arranged

for her especial benefit. When it was all over down she came to help with the wounded and dispense drinks.

The subaltern who had jumped on the pigs, and was none the worse for the adventure save for a sprained ankle, tried to explain.

"Mille pardons, madame," said he in his best French, "très faché j'ai jumped on votre petits porcs."

That settled it. Madame didn't know what he meant, but she recognised "porcs" and flew out into the yard.

"Good heavens," exclaimed the Gunner subaltern who was helping to carry one of his men into the house, "there's some cursed German after the women." And he drew his revolver and ran, too, as shriek after shriek rent the air.

Round the corner he came full tilt upon half a dozen Lancers doubled up with laughter round an old woman who was calling heaven to witness her grievous loss.

"What the——" he began, taking a trooper by the scruff of the neck. And then he saw.

Well, quiet was at length restored and Madame eventually pacified by a golden half-sovereign and the first subaltern's cap badge. And that gallant officer is, I am glad to say, still ready and willing to heave you out of the window whenever you may innocently inquire

as to the price of pork. But as he is now a major you have to be rather discreet.

The Germans had certainly brought their machine-gun work to a fine art. In the earlier volume I have described how they used them in infantry attack, and a few more notes at this stage may also prove of interest.

The great importance which the enemy attached to machine-guns is seen from the fact that where the British Army went in for rifle practice and competitions like those at Bisley and elsewhere the Germans held machine-gun competitions. They consider these to be infinitely more valuable. Each infantry regiment carries with it perhaps twelve of these guns, and they are always moved as a part of the regimental transport.

And the ingenuity which has been expended upon this transport is as remarkable as anything in their military organisation. Secrecy seems to be the dominant note. They are carried either on light motor-lorries or two-wheeled carts; sometimes on stretchers with a rug or covering thrown over. And at a short distance away these last look for all the world like a wounded man being carried by a couple of Red Cross orderlies. In fact, on many occasions our men have been completely taken in by the trick and have held their fire.

The carts, too, are generally provided with double bottoms, in which the machine-guns are packed, and perhaps four men ride in the vehicle. The rest of the cart is piled up with odds and ends of various kinds, and no one would guess the real contents. Instances have been recorded at G.H.Q. where some of these carts were captured and the guns never discovered until later someone knocked a bottom through by accident.

Then they have another trick of burying a machine-gun when there is a risk of capture. A wooden cross is put over the "grave," and, of course, no one would dream of disturbing the "body."

But as we have long since come to expect from the Huns, several of the transport tricks are not legitimate. Cases of abuse of the Red Cross were quite common. Knowing the enemy now for what they are it is obvious that they would not miss so excellent an opportunity of getting up close to their opponents by emblazoning their machine-gun lorries with a big red cross.[1] One can recall several instances where our men or French or Belgians have allowed a German Red Cross ambulance to drive close by when, as it passed, the hood

[1] The Germans, with their curious mentality, cannot believe that other nations would not adopt similar tactics in abuse of the Red Cross. Hence their attacks on hospital ships.

(of steel) has been slipped down to disclose a machine-gun which has promptly opened fire.

One particularly flagrant case was recorded a week after the Advance had begun. Here a party of Germans was seen advancing and waving a Red Cross flag in front of four stretchers carried by orderlies. The British officer ordered the cease fire and the party approached. When they were about 300 yards off a murderous maxim fire was opened. A general mix-up followed, and after our reinforcements had satisfactorily disposed of the would-be murderers the stretchers were found with the machine-guns still strapped on them.

As our advance pushed on, although it was rather a slow business at the outset, the fighting became more severe. The enemy made the best use of the difficult country, and we were continually checked by their cavalry and machine-gun tactics. When it was a question of dealing with their cavalry alone, and our own had half a chance, it was all over in a few minutes. It was the combination which worked the mischief. But even here the balance was not too heavy against us, for our cavalry seemed to be as useful dismounted as they were mounted, while their shooting was well up to the standard of the infantry.

I cannot do better than illustrate these two sides of our cavalry work by two incidents which, oddly enough, happened in the same engagement.

A regiment of German Dragoons had pushed its way south through the little village of Moncel after the retreating British. Now had come the inexplicable order to abandon the pursuit and return the way they had come. It was not in the best of tempers that the dragoons clattered once again down the village street, for the cursed English cavalry had been leading them a rare dance all the afternoon, and the experience had not been a pleasant one.

"Captain Schniff with a squadron will hold the village till further orders," the colonel commanded as he took the remainder of the regiment with him on the northern road.

The captain did not feel too happy about the position, and thought once or twice of telephoning to headquarters for a couple of maxims. However, deciding to make the best of it, he turned his attention to instilling a little wholesome respect for "Kultur" into the villagers. Unfortunately, his class was likely to be a small one, for everybody had fled with the exception of three old women, two girls, two old men and four or five children.

Nothing daunted, he and his men set to work upon the principles officially laid down by his

Government,[1] with the gratifying result that before nightfall the two old men had both been shot for trying to defend their womenfolk from insult; one girl had been outraged and had escaped somewhere after shooting the man with his own carbine, and the remainder had been reduced to a state of mental and physical paralysis.

Thus the night passed without further incident. But in the early morning the outposts fell back upon the village with the news that British cavalry had been seen in considerable strength moving in their direction. With a hurried order to the senior sergeant Captain Schniff made his way to a small outhouse at the end of the village where the field-telephone line ended, and in a few seconds had informed his brigade H.Q. that he was expecting an attack in force at any minute.

It came before he had removed the receiver-cap from his head.

Three sudden shots and Captain Schniff, running out into the street, found himself in the middle of a whirl of men and horses. Half his squadron had mounted, the rest had just got hold of their horses when the wave of British cavalry swept in from the south. A troop of the 9th Lancers, acting as advance guard, had driven

[1] "The Usages of War on Land," issued by the General Staff of the German Army. Translated by J. H. Morgan.

in the outposts, and not knowing, and caring less, what the enemy strength might be, had galloped straight at the village.

A few minutes of mad cut and thrust and the old people were avenged. The Lancers cleared the street from end to end almost in a single sweep. By the little outhouse door stood Schniff, pistol in hand. His first shot brought down a trooper with a bullet through his chest. His second tore a cut through a horse's shoulder. Then the wave swept over him. It passed; but the German captain still stood against the lintel, pinned to the wood with a sabre thrust clean through the neck.

Ranks were re-formed, two or three scouts sent forward to the north, and a message was despatched to the main body to report. There with the 9th Lancers were the 18th Hussars, and a brief debate followed as to whether they should push on or hold the village for a spell. The Colonel in command of the Lancers knew fairly accurately the enemy strength in cavalry in the immediate neighbourhood, and the odds against the British were rather heavy.

However, the point was soon decided for them. Captain Schniff's telephone message had been promptly acted upon, and some four new German squadrons were already well on the way to support their comrades. Our outposts fell back in their turn with the report

that the enemy were approaching fast from two sides.

A squadron of the Hussars was at once sent forward with orders to dismount and get under cover ready to open fire as they saw the best opportunity. The Lancers were formed up clear of the village, but still out of sight of the advancing Germans. The joking and laughter have for the moment died away, and every man sits as though carved in stone with that curious, empty feeling inside which will always creep over one when waiting for the moment. Officers nervously fidget at the reins and try to appear unconcerned as they rack their brains for a sentence or two of encouragement or warning for their men. The Colonel is well out to the front carefully judging the ground and distance. There is a gentle dip in the ground which his eye at once tells him is the spot where the shock should come. That extra down gradient will be worth to him a score more men.

"We'll get them all right," a subaltern says over his shoulder. "They always pull in a bit when we're on them." He had been through it before with his men, and knew about that odd, sudden shrinking which seems to attack German cavalry at the critical moment. The men knew too, and they instinctively settled to a tighter grip in the saddle, every eye on the man who was to lead them. The eternal seconds

passed and the tension grew till it was well-nigh unbearable; just as when a bowstring is slowly drawn back until it seems that the yew will surely snap.

Suddenly the Colonel sees that the moment has come. The enemy are riding diagonally across his front, and it may be possible to meet them before they can fully change direction. The signal is given and the Lancers have started, so steadily that they might be entering the arena at Olympia for the musical ride.

The pace increases. The Colonel has given his men plenty of room, for they'll need every bit of advantage they can get. "Steady, men, steady!" The enemy have begun to wheel—*Now!*

One tremendous bound forward and the gallant horses are stretched out to the uttermost. Down the slope they thunder. Each man tries to pick an opponent, but there is no time. There is one mighty crash all down the line. The Lancers have got home. Heave! and they are through. Through, with hardly a check of the pace, and on. The files close in and the men begin to drag at the bit reins. A wheel into section, and so to the village, again.

The Germans, too, have checked and wheeled round, but they are not so steady. Though by far the heavier cavalry they have

been badly mauled. It was like the little English ships sailing through and raking the great galleons of the Spanish Armada. Still, they recover and turn to retire the way they had come. Back they trot, re-forming ranks as they go. Now they have reached the northern end of the village. Now three hundred yards past, when there is a sudden burst of rifle fire and a hail of bullets ploughs through the hardly formed ranks.

(You had forgotten all about the Hussars, hadn't you?)

But the Germans know what discipline means, and they are courageous enough too. There is a momentary confusion, but a sudden word of command pulls them together, and about eighty odd men from the inner flank wheel about.

"By Jove!" exclaims the Hussar squadron leader, "they're actually going to charge us." Then, after a moment to make sure, "Cease fire!—we'll wait for 'em," he adds to himself.

The other officers and N.C.O.'s see in a moment what they are to do. It is an old trick, but it calls for nerves of steel to carry it out. The Hussars had been firing "rapid independent" on the retiring Germans, and it is not always easy to get your men quickly in hand again, especially when there is an avalanche of men and horses coming down on

top of you. Still, the Germans do not hold a grinding monopoly in discipline, and you might say that a crack British regiment will go one better, for the men are trained and disciplined as human beings, not machines.

"Not a shot till you get the word, and then two good volleys," sings out the O.C. "Aim low."

The German cavalry has covered 150 yards. They are getting alarmingly close, and coming for all they are worth dead straight. Again it is just a matter of seconds, but the O.C. is as cool as though it were practice on the Pirbright ranges.

100 yards! and—"Pfire!"

Every Hussar had picked his man, and that one volley accounted for practically the entire line of Dragoons. They say that only ten got back.

So ended perhaps the most brilliant cavalry engagement of the war up to that date, and, so far as I am aware, up to the time of writing. It illustrates very happily the mounted and dismounted work of our cavalry in those early days. All the world knows how magnificently they fought later in the trenches and not only our own Home cavalry, but those splendid men from India, the Deccan Horse, the Poona Light Horse, and other crack regiments.

The story, too, seems to tell of an adven-

ture in some earlier war. Of a time when the enemy was worth of your steel, and each faced the other for clean give-and-take fighting, with the better man to win. No rancour on either side, but a shake of the hand and a drink shared when it was over. Oh, the pity of it that the Germans cannot always fight so!

# III

## KULTUR

K. HEN. *Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God.*

NEVER, I suppose, since the dawn of history have a number of men crowded into so small a circle of time so many and such varied experiences as those which fell to the lot of that First Expeditionary Force of ours during the first six weeks of the war. I look back upon those autumn days of 1914, and they seem no more than "the insubstantial pageant of a dream." A dream from which, on the awakening, a few incidents stand out sharp and clear, but all else is lost save only a sense of atmosphere, of environment.

It was that atmosphere which I sought to recapture for the first part of the narrative. And now, as I embark upon the second part, I find that some subtle change has taken place. "Naturally," you will exclaim, "you have turned from a harassed retreat to a victorious advance. Of course it is different."

No, it is not that; at least, not wholly that.

I can see the dividing line between retreat and advance, but it is something bigger, more vague. Somehow the general tone of the campaign is different. The enemy is not the same, the countryside, the inhabitants, all are changed. Before the Advance was four days old there seems to have been, looking back now, some indefinable change even with our own men, some difference in outlook, some subdued note which sounded like a grave counterpoint beneath their natural elation at the turn of affairs. I do not think this lasted, for the inborn gaiety of the British soldier soon reasserted itself. But I seem to have detected it throughout this month of September.

And I am inclined to think that the new mental outlook which did not come upon us until the Advance had well begun was due to this, that we realised for the first time the incredible tragedy of this mighty social cataclysm. Look back for a moment and you may perhaps understand.

Barely a month had passed since that fateful August holiday night. Scarcely had the men realised that the country was at war before they were swept up by a giant hand, thrust into trains and troopships, dropped into a foreign land, hurried through the country and set before this Prussian god of destruction like Hindoo devotees before the car of Juggernaut. Before

they could begin to adjust themselves to these astonishing conditions they were swept back again through the mazes of a veritable nightmare. Everything was unreal, phantasmal. Villages, countryfolk, the pursuing hordes of blue-grey figures, all seemed to dance through the brain like motes in a vampire mist.

Then slowly came the awakening. The dream-cloud lifted and they began to see clearly. Before the Retreat had ended the men were themselves again. They turned to drive their pursuers back; and as they drove them back the British and French *saw*. Now they knew War for what it was; they recognised for what they were the beings who had hurled it upon the world.

So this was modern war; and this was how a great modern and civilised people waged it! "Kultur had passed that way!"

It was along the line of the Grand Morin river, from the town of Coulommiers through Rebais and so beyond La Ferté that our men made their first real acquaintance with German "Kultur." There had been a few isolated instances during the Retreat, symptoms of Hun brutality which had for the moment stricken with horror the unit immediately concerned. But now the troops suddenly crossed the threshold of a new world: a world which revealed

as in a blinding lightning-flash not merely the wanton excesses and unbridled licence of an invading army, but the unspeakable depravity of a nation.

Remember that at this time the war was barely a month old. The civilised world had not yet learned of the crimes committed in Belgium; the *Lusitania* had not been sunk, Rheims Cathedral had not been shelled, the ghastly story of Wittenberg camp was yet to come. Even the rumour about Dinant, Termonde and Louvain had barely reached the Army in the field, nor indeed was it credited. Personally, the first mail I received after leaving England on August 14, and the first newspaper I saw, was on September 16 at the Aisne. We knew practically nothing of the course of events. I mention these facts to suggest more clearly how unprepared the men must have been for the sights they now witnessed.

The little town of Rebais was the first. There were about two streets of houses still standing, the remainder was merely a ruin. When the first British troops entered after driving out the enemy it was imagined that the town was quite deserted. But after diligent search a few old men and half-crazy women were discovered in cellars and basements. A corporal and a couple of men got into one shop, and in the back room found two young girls.

They were trying to climb up the blank wall, legs and arms outstretched, as though they were flies. At the entrance of the men they merely glanced over their shoulders and laughed—a laugh which sent a shudder through the veins. When the corporal touched them they turned round, crouched on the ground and fawned upon him like puppies. In a cot close by lay the broken body of a tiny child. The corporal went out and reported to his officer with the tears rolling down his face.

Rebais, too, was the scene of one of the most extraordinary cases of sexual perversion on the part of some Germans ever recorded. I cannot possibly set down the story here; besides, it has already been published.[1] But it may be remarked in passing that one of the outstanding features of Hun "Kultur," as exhibited in Belgium and Northern France, has been a glut of such obscene and bestial acts as can only be detailed between the covers of a book of medical science as instances of mental and physical depravity.

From this line of country northward to the Aisne the Huns had left behind them one long track of foul deeds, ruin and desolation; a memory which nothing will efface from the heart of the French people till France is no more a

[1] "German Atrocities" (T. Fisher Unwin), by J. H. Morgan, late Home Office Commissioner with the B.E.F., p. 62.

nation. Some few places escaped in great measure, but there was not one which did not bear some traces of that trail of slime.

Here is a charming country-house which looks down to Nogent and the smiling valley of the Marne. One wing of the house projects and encloses on three sides a large courtyard. A company of our infantry bivouacked hard by one night, and the officers thought they might find hospitality in the house. Unable to make anyone hear, they went round to the courtyard side. This is what they found. The yard was ankle-deep in feathers—of pigeons and chickens. The gutters ran black-red with the blood of pigs and farm-stock. Hundreds of birds must have been slaughtered—from the number of pigeonries around the owner was evidently a fancier on a large scale.

The officers found a door open and entered the house. Stumbling over some broken woodwork and a big "grandfather" clock which lay across the passage, they came to a room which lay in darkness save for a narrow shaft of light from a chink in the shutters. Through the door there drifted a stench beside which the open sewers of a Chinese city in the height of summer would have smelt like a rose-garden. When at last they had ventured in, candles in hand, it was found that, in addition to the carcass of a pig which had been slaughtered on the carpet,

the room had been used, evidently by a number of men, as a latrine. Everything, too, which could be broken lay shattered on the floor, with curtains, blinds, tapestries and chair-coverings smeared with excreta and filth.

To cut the story short, practically every room in the house was in much the same condition. The state of the bedrooms, the linen, ladies' garments and so forth was simply indescribable.

One isolated case? No. Ask the French Government how many of their châteaux in those Departments of France escaped such a fate.

In the great majority of cases the destruction or, in its milder forms, the mischief, was purely wanton. Destruction simply for the sake of destruction. Ironmongery shops and houses where there were plenty of bottles and glasses to smash seemed particular favourites. In town after town we came across ironmongers' where thousands of nails and screws were scattered from the drawers and boxes all over the floors; or perfumers' shops where all the bottles of liquids had been broken by pistol bullets or rifle butts.

Cooking utensils would be looted in one town, used and then thrown into the ditch to save the trouble of transport, and the process would be repeated in the next village. At least, this was the only explanation we could imagine

for the number of pots and pans found lying about uncleaned.

Systematic looting was quite the least of the crimes committed. And one may give some idea of the extent to which this was carried out by citing the one town of Coulommiers, a place about the size of Tunbridge Wells. Here the Huns, during the two days of their occupation, pillaged the houses and did minor damage to the value of some £16,000. Such was the condition of the town when our troops expelled the Germans from it at the beginning of September.

Of the outrages and mutilations inflicted upon women and young girls and children I hardly trust myself to write. Their number seemed well-nigh incalculable. Never a town, village, or hamlet, rarely a farmstead did our men pass during those days of victory and horror but poor victims stretched forth imploring arms or lay still with fast-glazing eyes, mute witnesses to the bestial savagery of the invaders, the nation of supermen destined by their "friend" God to inherit the earth. Of a surety will the God Whom they never cease to blaspheme take His count upon them on that Great Day when St. Joseph shall marshal before Him in witness the ranks of those poor tortured souls.

Though vengeance, though repayment are His, yet such is man that he must at times rejoice at the finding of a human instrument. One such case I recall, and I can find no regret in my heart for the fate of one, at least, of these savages.

It was at a farm near Château-Thierry. A patrol of Uhlans rode by. Through the open door they could see the goodwife busy about her duties, crooning the while to her baby as he played by the hearth. Roughly the men demanded food, and, entering, one of the patrol made as if to hurt the child. Food was refused, the woman saying that she had nothing in the house. A search of the house proved fruitless, and they again made their demand. Again she replied that there was none. Thereupon the men seized her, pinned her against the door and crucified her, arms outstretched, with knives through her wrists. The child they seized, broke one of his tiny arms, and threw him down before her. Then they rode away, leaving behind one of their number for some purpose or other.

When the patrol had gone on the man who remained again asked for food and drink. And the woman, in agony, nodded assent. The knives were withdrawn. The man seated himself at the table while the woman staggered out to the back. In a minute or so she returned, holding something under her apron.

The Uhlan sat quietly at the table looking through a notebook. The woman came behind him as though to place a dish on the table. A sudden effort and she drew from beneath her apron a heavy chopper. With a single crash she split his skull. Then, seizing her baby, she fled out into the woods.

There is perhaps no people in the world who have earned a more sinister reputation for ingenuity in torture than the Chinese. Methods employed in our own country during the Middle Ages or by the Spanish Inquisition were bad enough, as we know too well. But Germany, with its stucco civilisation, has outdistanced all. The Chinese are adepts in the torture of the body; the Germans torture body and soul. The Chinese may torture the individual; the Germans add the refinement of torturing two or more together. They will outrage a wife in the presence of her husband, a daughter before her mother. They will tie a mother up and mutilate her baby before her eyes. All these things have they done again and again: not in the heat of battle, but under the coolness of rigid discipline; with the connivance and encouragement of their officers.[1]

[1] A typical and thoroughly authenticated case, where a German soldier dipped a baby's head into a saucepan of boiling water to make the mother produce some more coffee, is quoted in the Appendix to the Bryce Report, p. 287.

A company of British infantry was marching through a Marne village. One of the men turned to wave a hand to a little girl whose face appeared at a first-floor window of a cottage.

"Silly owl!" remarked a pal. "Can't you see it's a doll?"

The company marched on. In the evening some men from an Irish regiment joined up, and it chanced that the little incident of the afternoon was mentioned in a joking way.

"It *was* a child," said an Irishman gravely. "Shure, we saw herself. McClusky and me and some of us went in. 'Twas a baby tied across the window, with a cruel bay'net in her. Aye, and an old man, too, and a woman and a boy, all stabbed to the death."[1]

Do you begin dimly to realise what was this new world through which the British Army was advancing? Do you now appreciate a little of the feeling which steeled their hearts?

And since it is of interest to learn how the invaders themselves regarded their own doings, here is the translation of a portion of a letter written by a German soldier,[2] and selected at

[1] *Cf.* the incident narrated in "The Retreat from Mons," p. 170.

[2] The name, regiment, brigade and division of the writer are on the original, together with date and town.

random from a number of others. The letter is addressed to a German *girl*.

"I am sending you a bracelet made out of a shell. It will be a nice souvenir for you of a German warrior who had been through the whole campaign and killed many French. I have also bayoneted several women. During the fight at Batonville (*sic*) I did for seven women and four young girls in five minutes," etc.

On the other hand, it is pleasant to record that one diary at least has come into the possession of the French authorities in which the author, an officer in a Saxon corps, honestly deplores the vandalism and wanton outrages committed by the soldiery.

"The place," he writes, "is a disgrace to our army." And he adds the significant words: "The column commanders are responsible for the greater part of the damage, as they could have prevented the looting and destruction."

With that I close this harrowing chapter. I have tried to set forth those incidents as dispassionately as possible, and have steeled myself to the effort. Of several I write at first-hand. There are others still more horrible of which I know but cannot narrate. To say that the memory of those scenes is seared for

ever in the brain is hopelessly inadequate. They have changed the very lives of the men who witnessed them. How could it be otherwise?

And I have made myself write them down partly that this may be a true narrative of those early days of this War of Liberation, but rather that our people may realise—so far as a printed page can compel—the real nature of this enemy of civilisation and humanity.

I have remarked that it is the depravity of a whole nation rather than the individual excesses of an army which is responsible for these things. A national army reflects the spirit of the nation. The German Army was, at the outbreak of war, just such an army as Britain in 1916 had in the field. Representative, I mean, of the nation as a whole. It was not a select body of professional troops such as ours was. And it was that national army—and, through it, the German people—which was guilty of those incredible outrages against all laws human and divine.

For years past, though but a few of us realised it, the criminal statistics of Germany have indicated only too plainly the rapid moral degeneration of the people. It has at length found its expression, so far as the rest of the world is concerned, in the tremendous catalogue of crimes committed by German soldiers and

sailors, which, from the number and the ferocity of them, have actually at last dulled the brain of civilisation. We have, for instance, come to accept the murder on the high seas of women and children as a matter of everyday occurrence.

But no national army and navy, recruited as it is from the ranks of the nation itself, could possibly be guilty of such obscenity and criminality were it not that the poison had choked their very blood. It is the German people who are guilty. Have we already forgotten the unholy joy throughout Germany which greeted the sinking of the *Lusitania* and so the deliberate murder of scores of women and children? Or the delight evinced when Zeppelins shed destruction on harmless non-combatants? Or the deliberate torture inflicted by German *civilians* upon helpless, wounded prisoners of war conveyed through their country? Or, most incredible of all, the calculated and callous cruelty of German Red Cross nurses, the mothers, sisters and wives of Germans?

They say that we fight to crush Prussian militarism; that we will never treat with the Hohenzollerns and ruling caste; that we would *free* the German people from their oppressors. How foolish it sounds! We understand the Germans as little as the Germans understand human beings. What purpose to humanity

will be served by a German revolution? The German people remain. Does civilisation hope completely to change the mental and physical outlook of an entire people who, in their nature, have altered not a whit since they emerged from their primeval caves and forests?

These are the things which I would have my fellow-countrymen and women remember when the day of reckoning comes. The men who are now fighting in France and Flanders have not seen things such as I have set down. But there are still amongst them a few—a tiny few—who have seen and who remember. Shall not these be allowed a voice when that reckoning arrives? And France? *She* will never forget. And it is France and Belgium who will cast the die; for it is they who have suffered. Suffered in such wise as this England of ours has not dreamed of.

*Par mes champs dévastés, par mes villes en flammes,*
*Par mes ôtages fusillés,*
*Par le cri des enfants massacrés et des femmes,*
*Par mes fils tombés par milliers—*
*Je jure de venger le Droit et la Justice.*

And if at the last the justice of men cannot reach the criminals, still is there the justice of God, and that shall not fail.

"They have no wings to fly from God."

# IV

## DAYS OF THE ADVANCE

K. Hen. *The game's afoot:*
*Follow your spirit, and upon this charge*
*Cry—"God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"*

Half a dozen dumpy, grey motor-buses, newly sped out of Paris, came panting heavily up the hill. They had been converted by French ingenuity into big meat-safes, and as they climbed one caught a glimpse of legs of mutton through the wire gauze which was stretched across the window-frames.

"Benk, 'O'burn, Benk! Penny all the way!" was the greeting all down the ranks of a perspiring battalion incontinently thrust to the side of the road to allow the vehicles to pass.

"We could do with a few o' them, mate," remarked Private Cherry to his next number. "That's wot we want—some of them ole number 'levens orf of the Strand. It's orl right, this foot-sloggin' is, in a manner o' speakin'; but wot I sez is, that yer carn't ginger up the Allemons not 'arf wot yer might. Lumme! They carn't arf 'op it! Why, yer——"

"Fall in!"

The men drop back into their fours, and in a few moments are off again after the retreating Germans.

By now that retreat is beginning to look suspiciously like a rout. It was not that, but the men were mightily cheered by the sight of abandoned vehicles and impedimenta of all kinds, and particularly by the steady stream of prisoners being passed through to the rear. You can imagine the curiosity with which Private Thomas A. regarded the first detachments which were escorted by. The general opinion was summed up in the sentence:

"Rummy-lookin' lot of blighters, aren't they?"

And you may take that as an expression of amused affection, criticism, pity, dislike, or sarcasm, as you please. Knowing something of Tommy and his ways, I am inclined to think that there was a generous sprinkling of the first-named quality included. That was at the beginning. After a few days' experience of their behaviour, and until the Aisne was reached, that opinion was somewhat modified. It ran:

"——— ——— ——————— ———!"

Those Huns became a positive nuisance. You couldn't move without running up against little parties anxious to return to

England, and our lads were far too busy to bother about providing escorts. Not that escorts were really needed, for Cousin Fritz was remarkably docile. A single uniform of khaki was quite sufficient, even if the wearer carried no more lethal a weapon than a walking-stick.

Long after the wave of pursuit had rolled the Germans back, they still went on surrendering to the bus-drivers and A.S.C. in the rear. One A.S.C. corporal went for a short evening stroll in a little wood hard by. He did not even carry a stick, but he came back decorated with rifles and bayonets and things, and three sheepish Huns in tow.

A special department was needed to cope with prisoners. This was soon improvised, and our men got into the habit of straggling off to round up Huns. It became quite an evening pastime if there was a halt of a few hours for a rest and food. By the way, there is another little habit of Thomas A. You would imagine that he would be only too glad to sit down after a stiff march and a bit of a scrap, have his tea and smoke his "fag" in peace. Not a bit of it. If he cannot find a football to kick about, he'll sit and "buck" on every conceivable subject until he has to fall in again—and then he is so sleepy he can't keep his eyes open.

And the chance of securing a few souvenirs for the "missus" at home was too good to let slip. Some of these little trophies of the chase were quite worth having, although I am not quite sure that Tommy should have taken them. We have a somewhat different standard from the Hun in these matters. Still, as most of the souvenirs were pressed upon the captors out of gratitude, it was probably in order. Of course, a handsome gold watch, or a pair of useful field-glasses, may sometimes have changed hands as an expression of gratitude; but I suspect that cases involving a little gentle persuasion were not quite unknown, for it is difficult to imagine that a Hun would willingly part with such things.

A lad of mine was very proud over one of his captures. I don't know how this particular man was rounded up, but he turned out to be no less a personage than the premier marksman of the German Army. At least, he said he was, and showed the gold Imperial badge on the sleeve of his tunic. The badge now reposes in a little frame on the wall of a best parlour somewhere down the Walworth Road, S.E.

Here is another trifling incident in this wholesale capture of Huns which shall be recorded, not because it was of any particular importance or interest, but because its suc-

cessful issue was in some measure due (I will be quite frank with you) to one of my own little fads. Most of us have our fads and fancies, and one of mine chances to be insisting on the importance of "observation," keeping your eyes and ears open and making correct deductions from trifles. Incidentally, the men concerned were town lads, who were only beginning such training.

One morning a farmer came along and begged us to settle up with some Huns who were making themselves too much at home in his house. A small patrol of men under a corporal, all being trained in observation work, was selected. They had to try to rush the farm without their approach being seen.

The back of the farm gave on to a copse of trees. "What kind of trees?" asked the corporal. "Beech," was the reply. So the corporal knew at once that as there is little or no undergrowth in a beech copse it would be difficult to get at the house unseen from that side. However, they made a start.

Very quietly they approached the copse. Suddenly a pair of wood-pigeons flew out, disturbed, so they guessed, by someone in the wood. That settled it, for there was no one else about save the Huns. The patrol crept round to the front, got in and surprised four Huns in the back kitchen. A fifth was in the

copse collecting wood. Had the corporal not known about beech trees, and had they missed the significance of the pigeons' flight, the little surprise might not have come off so successfully.

A keen Press correspondent would have given his ears for the chance of being present with the B.E.F. on Tuesday and Wednesday, September 8 and 9, and of standing on the southern ridges above the Marne Valley as the fighting developed. For the moment one seemed to forget the horror of modern warfare in this bird's-eye view of intense movement. Here, at least, was a battle out of the story books, and one may reasonably doubt whether such another will ever be witnessed.

Our front ran along the south bank of the Marne and extended, roughly, from Château-Thierry on the east to La Ferté on the west. Midway between lay the village of Nogent l'Artaud. This was only a small place, but of considerable importance, owing to the main road from the south which passed through and crossed the river by an excellent bridge, a fine specimen of French engineering work. The river at this point is about as broad as the Thames at Windsor. On either bank the ground slopes gradually down, the ridges on the southern banks being rather the higher. The

dead level of the valley, with the river flowing through, is perhaps a mile across.

Thus standing on the high ground above Nogent you get a fine panorama of the Marne Valley, and so it is from here that we will watch events for a few mintues. The general position is that you have the German rear-guards crossing the river and following the main bodies which are trekking off to the north as hard as they can move. The British are gradually gaining the southern ridges and then launching down into the valley and up beyond in stern pursuit. But although it is definite pursuit, the fighting is deadly serious all through, and every point of vantage which can help the enemy is hotly contested by them.

At La Ferté the Third Corps[1] under General Pulteney were having a stiff fight to cross the river, for the Germans had destroyed the bridges. But the good old English county regiments down there were not going to be held up by a trifle like that. They'm coom up from Zommerzet, they be—and Zommerzet breeds good fighting men. And then there are lads from the stiff plough-lands of Essex, as hardy as the soil of that stern county. And there are Hampshire lads, and

[1] This corps (so-called) was then composed only of the Fourth Division and 19th Infantry Brigade. It will be remembered that these commands had been hitherto working under General Smith-Dorrien.

lads from lovely Warwickshire, and lads fra Lancashire. Wales, too, with her Fusiliers, had her share of the fight that day. Add in Highlanders and battalions of three different Irish regiments, and you'll see what a command that little Third Corps was. The G.O.C. should have been a proud man those days.

The bridges are gone and the Germans hold the north bank with a few dozen machine-guns. Behind these up the slopes are batteries of field-guns. No, it does not seem a very easy task.

British batteries, not more than a dozen, have slipped into positions in support of our infantry. To the rear there are a couple of "heavy" batteries. We, too, have a few machine-guns, but very few. It was a weapon which had not been considered by the powers-that-were of particular importance.

All day long British and Germans pounded away at each other with no great effect on either side. Our guns could not always manage to locate and silence the enemy machine-guns, and an attempted crossing of the river by the infantry would thus have been sheer madness, for there was as yet no bridge.

In the afternoon the cheery news came along that both the First and Second Corps had crossed the Marne higher up and were pushing ahead. Third Corps H.Q. was quite seriously

annoyed at being left. But their hour had almost struck. It was now up to the Sappers to provide the means.

At two or three favourable points the bridging materials were ready. As the darkness gathered these were rushed down to the bank and the Sappers went at it like demons. The night was pitch dark save for the fitful flashes from the guns and a gleam from burning houses on the north bank; later the rain came down in torrents.

Swiftly but surely the Sappers worked. At one point something like a dummy bridge was made where the burning shone more brightly. This to draw the enemy's fire so far as possible. The ruse succeeded admirably. But a company of the Blankshires, very bored at the long wait, decided to make a little voyage of discovery on some roughly-made rafts. Gaily they slipped from the moorings, and once out in the stream promptly lost all control. A little later some of the "Jocks" who were patiently waiting farther down the river heard a medley of strange oaths, gurgles, and frantic splashings coming from midstream. There was no mistaking a good, honest English "damn," even though uttered in broad dialect, and that probably saved the explorers from a hot rifle fire from the Scots.

"What the de'il are ye doin' oot there this

time o' the nicht?" a voice rang out from the bank.

"We're the Blankshires—trying to cross," came the plaintive answer.

"Ye're no the Blankshires"—this very emphatically—"ye're a daft set o' loonies tae gang paddlin' aboot i' the burn this middle o' the nicht. Gin ye maun wash yersels ye dinna need to mak' sic a boast aboot it."

But by the time the little homily was finished the adventurers were nearly out of hearing. Some of them jumped overboard and reached the bank, but for the remainder it was a forlorn little party which drifted into a French outpost in the early morning and was rescued. "Quite mad, all these English," remarked the French captain, and no one bothered any more.

Long before the dawn the Sappers had finished their job and the infantry had slipped across. Once at grips with the enemy there was little further trouble so far as La Ferté was concerned. But the Third Corps, with the Fourth French Corps (8th Division) next on their left, still had a very tough proposition in the shape of a very strong artillery position held by something like ninety German guns. I believe this was eventually solved by the Second Corps driving in a wedge behind the position and forcing a retirement.

The crossing of the Marne by Nogent and

Charly was noteworthy because there was no resistance. It was an awkward place to capture, and there was that excellent bridge there which the enemy were certain to destroy. Great were the preparations for the assault, and everyone was on the tiptoe of excitement.

You picture our advance guards spread out down the slope to the village, creeping forward from cover to cover. Nearer still, and not a rifle shot breaks the silence of that early September morning. Not a blue-grey coat to be seen, not a movement in the valley. It was all so uncanny that the men were convinced that they were going straight into some devilish ambush.

At length a couple of scouts went forward. They were watched down to the outlying houses. A woman came out.

"Where's the Allemonds, mother?" asked one of the scouts, keeping his eyes and ears open for any sign of movement.

The good woman replied with a torrent of abuse against the "accursed ones." Then, seeing that the man couldn't understand a word she took him by the arm and drew him towards the house.

"Here, what's the game?" said the man, very naturally holding back.

The woman pushed open the door and pointed in. Then the man saw it all in a flash.

Inside were four Germans lying on the floor amid a heap of empty bottles, dead drunk. And from the gestures of the woman he soon gathered that there were plenty of others about in the same condition. In fact, the village had been the scene of a tremendous drinking bout. The Germans had come across a fine stock of old wine, and the day before a regiment had drunk itself senseless. There were now only about thirty left in the village incapable of moving; the remainder had slipped away on the approach of the British, and were gradually rounded up in batches in the neighbouring woods. And a nice-looking lot of camp-followers they were too!

The bridge had been heavily barricaded, and it took nearly an hour to cut the barbed wire away. They had evidently intended to make a stiff fight for it, but the wine was too good to miss. Incidentally, there were no preparations for blowing up the bridge, and from the fact that several others were left intact General Smith-Dorrien remarked at the time that he suspected they were left so for use on the return journey of the Germans. Well, the bridges are still waiting for them.

Elsewhere the crossing of the Marne was not so easy. The First Corps, for instance, had some very hard fighting before they gained the

northern bank. They had, also, one or two old-fashioned spectacular displays to cheer them on. There was one place where the Germans had run a pontoon bridge across. If you are standing on the crest above Nogent you'll probably be able to pick it out with a pair of good glasses; it is up towards Château-Thierry. One of our airmen reported a mass of enemy troops crossing, streaming down one slope and up the other. A Horse Battery was the first to open fire. I don't remember what the range was, but it was like the dear old pre-war Practice Camp days on Salisbury Plain when a couple of canvas screens representing cavalry used to roll down towards the guns, and you'd plug in shell at about 300 yards' range and go home for lunch.

The Horse Gunners had it all to themselves for nearly a quarter of an hour—the time of their lives. Then a Field Battery came along, and the Major's face, when he saw what they were firing at, would have given Bairnsfather a fine idea for a new sketch. One recalls Jellicoe's too-good-to-be-true message to Beatty and the battle-cruisers at Jutland Bank, "You can sheer off now; I'll finish the job."

Anyway, a compromise was effected; the Horse Gunners limbered up and clattered off for a still nearer view of the target, while the Field Gunners set contentedly to work in their

stead. I can see that Major now, sitting on the No. 1 gun wagon-body with a chunk of hard chocolate in one hand and half a French roll in the other, as he switched the battery from one part of the target to another, as though he were spraying a flower-bed. He did not, however, get so long an innings as the Horse Gunners, for an enemy battery, with the exact range, began to retaliate, and he had to run his guns back. Still, it was a nice chatty little twenty minutes while it lasted.

Everywhere the roads were littered with equipment, arms and vehicles, and there was no doubt that the retirement was more hurried than the enemy had intended. But, as it turned out, we were only engaged with very strong rear-guards, and critics say that the British should have pushed on a great deal more rapidly than they did. To that I am not competent to reply; I can only remark that the spirit and élan of the men could not possibly have been keener, and I do not quite see how they could have speeded up the driving power unless it were with the horses.

For the horses, poor old comrades, were suffering a good deal, especially as the weather had begun to turn wet and cold. Remember what they had gone through in the last three weeks and how nobly they had responded to every call. Remember, too, that in no army

in the world is so much care bestowed upon its horses as in ours. To the trooper or driver his horse (or pair) is almost his best pal, and you, an Englishman or woman who reads, will know what that must mean. One of the first things taught to a recruit in a mounted regiment is the idea of making his horse a pet. And, so far as the Gunners are concerned, you will find one indirect result of that happy teaching in the reputation which the Regiment has won for being able to drive the guns over the most impossible country and take them anywhere. What a wonderful combination it would be to have the French "75's" with English teams and drivers!

But if it was almost impossible to keep the horses in condition the men were in splendid fettle, despite all their hardships. People are rather apt to forget that this was identically the same army which had just won through the Retreat, and that, as yet, there had been no opportunity for any rest and reorganisation. In equipment the officers were as badly off as the men. Most of them had no great-coats, waterproof sheets, nor any change of clothing, for all extra kit had been ruthlessly sacrificed or thrown away. At one point, it will be remembered, orders had been issued to destroy all officers' baggage.[1] In my own unit, for in-

[1] *Vide* "The Retreat from Mons," p. 220.

stance, I do not believe there were more than a dozen pairs of serviceable boots left. The men stuck to their work with bare feet coming through what was left of the leather. And this shortage was not made good for another three weeks.

The base was right away down at the mouth of the Loire, and the farther we advanced the more difficult it became to get up supplies. Also, during the Retreat, a large number of railway bridges had been destroyed behind us, and this meant that in the Advance the trains could not get within some 30 miles of us. The wonder is that the A.S.C. achieved so much in getting up food and ammunition. On the Retreat there was a reasonable chance of getting food and little necessaries in the towns and villages, for the country was then untouched. Now we were moving forward in the track of a plague of locusts, and you could not buy even a box of matches or a stick of chocolate. Perhaps if critics will bear all these little facts in mind they will not be so ready to condemn.

A typical example of the difficulties of the fighting in the Marne valley was furnished by an episode in which the D.C.L.I.'s[1] played a part. It was a fight for Montreuil aux Lions,

[1] Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry: serving in 14th Infantry Brigade, Fifth Division.

a little place strongly held by the enemy and screened by thick woods.

It began with one of those desperate attacks, doomed to failure, by infantry insufficient in numbers across the open upon strong, concealed defensive positions. However, the D.C.L.I.'s were ordered to clear the enemy out, and so they tackled the job straight away.

One company worked round to a flank by a sunken road, deployed into extended order along a hedgerow and waited for the signal. A second company deployed in similar fashion for a frontal attack. With a shrill blast of a whistle they were all on their feet. A twenty yards' rush only brought a few scattered rifle-shots from the wood, and they were on their feet again for a second advance. Then the storm broke. There must have been a dozen maxims protecting that short front of wood, and with a single crash they opened fire on the Cornwalls. Within twenty seconds those two companies lost half their number.

Reserves doubled up to their support, and a second gallant attack was repulsed in the same way, though a couple of our own maxims backed it up so far as they could. Four times at different points did the Cornwalls face the murderous fire. In one corner they got home, and for a few minutes there was fierce work with the bayonet and rifle-butt. Two guns they

captured, but the corner was too hot to hold, and they went down fighting to the last man.

By now it was the late afternoon, and messages were sent back for reinforcements. With the darkness General Cuthbert had concentrated the greater part of his Brigade, and by midnight the men of Kent and Yorkshire had avenged their comrades and swept the woods and village clear of the enemy.

There was much hard fighting of this nature, especially with the First Corps, and in one or two places the Guards suffered badly before they could get to grips with the enemy. But once the machine-guns were beaten down, and our men got to close quarters, the Germans crumpled immediately and put up their hands.

With the Marne safely crossed the going was very much easier, and our men pushed ahead in splendid style. The country was far more open, and there were comparatively few of those awkward woods to be cleared. Thus a few lucky R.F.A. batteries were given a very cheery three or four days' work of a character which will probably never be known again in war. They were sent forward with the pursuing cavalry to manœuvre as Horse batteries, and worry the retiring Boche as much as possible. These were tactics which we had recently experienced at the hands of the enemy during the Retreat, and they had not been pleasant for us.

It is rather curious that we should so soon have had the opportunity of retaliating, and with excellent effect, despite the miserable weather and dreadful condition of the roads.

Looking back over those days of the Advance, and putting this and that together, I cannot help thinking that the Force accomplished very notable work; work such as should not be forgotten. For generations this great turning-point in the world's history will, I suppose, be discussed by critics and historians. We should have done this; the French ought to have done that; the Germans might have done so-and-so. In this volume no attempt is made to contribute to that discussion. But there is one point which I would emphasise; one remark which I would make to the learned sages. Do not ignore the human element! The little flags which you pin into large-scale maps, the little wooden blocks which you manœuvre as you would chessmen, these are in reality but men like you.

That tiny Force, although it held no more than a tenth part of that long 300-mile front, did the work allotted to it because the spirit of the men soared exultant above all difficulty and hardship. (It is not for me to speak of our French Allies.) You may move your pawns across the board and say, "by such an hour

they should have been on such a line," but the pawns which you move are flesh and blood. The men had already achieved the incredible, and, knowing this, you ask why they did not continue to perform miracles.

At this time, with the exception of the 2,000 men already mentioned as reinforcements, the losses of the Force in men and guns had not been made good, despite the statement in the London Press of August 29 that they had. For instance, the Second Corps alone was 42 guns below its strength, or the equivalent of seven entire field batteries.

I cannot resist adding by way of comment the Press Bureau bulletin published in the *Times* of September 7, 1914:

> In all drafts amounting to 19,000 men have reached our army or are approaching them on the Lines of Communication, and advantage is being taken of the five quiet days (*sic*) that have passed since the action of September 1 to fill up the gaps and refit and consolidate the units.

This presumably referred to the Army in India, or to reinforcements being sent to France via the Cape of Good Hope. But the "five quiet days!"

If there must be criticism, let it be directed not against the Force, but against the politicians then in power who for seven long years

refused to listen to the men who warned them of what would certainly come to pass; who told them the actual month of the year when Germany would make her murderous attack.

The losses had not been made good as they should have been, and the fault did not lie with the military authorities. It was the war-worn veterans of two amazing weeks' campaigning who turned and drove back 60 miles over a 30-mile front an enemy vastly superior in numbers, in guns, in ammunition and in equipment, and it was the unconquerable pride of race which enabled them to do it.

# V

## A LITTLE MUSIC, AND A CHURCH PARADE

K. HEN. *'Tis good for men to love their present pains*
*Upon example ; so the spirit is eased :*
*And when the mind is quicken'd, out of doubt,*
*The organs, though defunct and dead before,*
*Break up their drowsy grave and newly move*
*With casted slough and fresh legerity.*

A CERTAIN unit was temporarily held up during the Advance at a little village on the Marne. It chanced that they remained there for twenty-four hours. The men bedded-down in a couple of big barns while the C.O. found a room in the adjoining farm. In one of the rooms there was a little piano, and the C.O. hit upon the idea of giving the men a musical entertainment, or rather of helping them to give one.

Now the C.O. was Captain Eldridge (at his request I omit his real name), and Eldridge was a man with no small reputation as a musician, composer and elocutionist. He was, in fact, recognised as one of the finest living reciters of Dickens's "Christmas Carol," while as a lecturer he had been very popular in many parts of the world for some years past. This by way of introducing him.

The men were delighted with the idea; the

piano was soon carried out into the barn, some oil lamps and candles were secured, and Eldridge started in. The proceedings opened with some eight or nine rollicking choruses of popular songs, "Who's your lady friend," "Hold your hand out," "Everybody's doing it," and so on. But artfully sandwiched in were three or four of the old songs, "Heart of Oak," "Loch Lomond," and others.

Then Eldridge gave a little chat about the beauty and value of the old songs, the well-known ditties and the lesser-known folk songs, singing in illustration "Yarmouth is a pretty town," "The Golden Vanity," and others. The men were obviously amazed that such songs could have been created by the country-folk, and before the hour was up they were singing "Golden Vanity" as though they had known it all their lives. And it was a fact, as the lecturer pointed out to them, that the songs which they had sung the best were the old English ones.

This incident seems worth recording for two reasons, apart from its comment on the old tag about "not being a musical nation." One is that the little entertainment was the first given to the men on active service during the war; and that it was from this and subsequent ones, with some stirring lectures on phases of the war, given by Eldridge, that the authorities came to realise the vital importance of this form of recrea-

tion for the men. Hence came the organisation of regular concert parties by Miss Lena Ashwell and of frequent tours of the "front" by well-known artists.

The second point of interest is that it shows one side of the work which the "Naval and Military Musical Union" has been doing for several years past in the two Services. The value of good music for our fighting men has never been properly and officially recognised. Thus, as usual, it was left for private enterprise to show the way. I believe that General Smith-Dorrien (who, by the way, is President of the Union) begged hard that some of the military bands might be sent to France in the early days. Eventually, after many weary months, some were sent, and immediately they had the fine, tonic effect on the men which he knew would be the case. Who can ever forget the immortal story of Major Tom Bridges collecting the stragglers in St. Quentin and marching them away to the tune of "The British Grenadiers," played on a penny whistle and toy drum?

No, you cannot beat the fine old land- and sea-songs for the men to sing. And once they know them the men are in full agreement. As Eldridge remarked, "I am quite ready to play ragtime by the hour for the boys to sing, but it was 'Heart of Oak' which beat our lads to quarters for the battle of Trafalgar."

Nor can I resist recording another incident which happened the next day, a Sunday. It looked as though a move would not be made until the afternoon, and as this was the first opportunity since Mons, Eldridge paraded the men and asked if they would like to have a Church Parade service. There was no mistake about the enthusiastic response, and so the Roman Catholics fell out to a flank and were marched off to a tiny church for 10 o'clock Mass, while the Church of England party filed in to the barn where the piano was.

This was the order of Service; and again, unless I am mistaken, it was the first Church Parade service held in the Force since they had landed on French soil:—

General Confession: Lord's Prayer: Preces and Responses: Hymn, "O God, our Help in Ages Past": Lesson from the Old Testament, where Jonathan and his armour-bearer go up against the Philistines: Hymn, "Rock of Ages" (by general request): Prayers, (*a*) the noble supplication used every morning in the Navy, "O Eternal Lord God, Who alone spreadest out the heavens" (but specially adapted that day to the Army), (*b*) two other suitable prayers: Hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers": National Anthem.

It may be added that there were only two prayer- and hymn-books available, one of which

Eldridge had to use, but never, so he told me, had he heard the hymns and National Anthem sung with deeper feeling or enthusiasm.

The Service was repeated, by general request, three Sundays later, when opportunity presented itself, at the Aisne. This time the men, some 300 strong, formed up on open ground in three sides of a square. There was no piano and again only two spare hymn-books. But the congregation made a brave effort over the hymns, and, at least, they knew the National Anthem. And all the while the great guns thundered through the valley. There was no padre to take the Service, but I am inclined to think that it owed much of its effect upon the men to the fact that it was their own C.O. who laid with them their offering of prayer and thanksgiving before the Throne of the Almighty.

I have often been asked about the attitude of the men generally towards religion and spiritual matters, and I have found it very difficult to give an adequate reply. Englishmen have a natural reluctance to speak about such things, and if there is one who does he appears to be regarded with suspicion. After all, it is by noble example rather than by precept that a man wins the confidence and esteem of his fellows in the matter of religion, and active service must inevitably bring out all that is best in the

man. If an officer has shown his command that he is a *man* and an English gentleman in the best sense of the word, the rest naturally follows.

There is an old proverb, "Let him who knows not how to pray go to sea." And in this is war like the sea, for both must needs engender prayer in a man. I do not believe that any man can be an atheist in the daily presence of death. The faith in a Supreme Being, the trust in the efficacy of prayer, may not be apparent to his comrades, but it is there, none the less, hidden deep in the heart of a man.

During the opening month there was practically no opportunity for officers and men to partake of the "most comfortable Sacrament" of the Holy Communion, but so soon as it was possible to hold the Service in various commands the response to the summons was almost overwhelming. And the same conditions were always to be seen at the Base on the eve of a draft's departure for the "front."

But if the ghostly comfort of the Church Service and the ministrations of a priest were denied them, when through the welter of battle there was no time for thought or prayer, may we not say with perfect sincerity that the men made of their great work a prayer? Who is it will deny that the self-sacrificing devotion of men for their comrades, the succour of wounded under fire, the pity and help extended to the

country-folk, even the rescue of dumb animals —who will deny that prayers such as those were not more acceptable to God than the "words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts"?

And there was another aspect. I can best indicate it by an example. One night I had to look after a man who was badly hit and suffering agony. There was no doctor available, and in the meantime I dosed him with opium to relieve the pain. After a little while he tried to get at his pocket. Helping him, I found a letter and placed it in his hand.

"It's all right, sir," he replied, "number's not up yet——" Then in a minute or so, "Mother—says—she's praying for me—read letter."

I read the letter as he asked, but the words are too sacred to set down. The man pulled through safely, partly, perhaps, owing to a splendid constitution, but mainly, I think, because he willed to live, supremely confident that the old mother's prayer must be granted.

This incident must have been just one of hundreds like it. The men did not talk of such things save, perhaps, in an extreme case like that one. But when they did it was always with a perfect simplicity which carried immediate conviction. People at home, bishops and clergymen, used to assert with professional

pride that there was a great spiritual revival with the Army in the field. They suggested that the teachings of the Church were responsible for the awakening. The padres working with the troops knew better. Just as the war has altered our outlook on the material life, so has it extended and transformed our vista of the spiritual. And one thing, at least, is certain, the time has come when our dignitaries of the Church must needs set their house in order, for "our sons have shown us God."

I think there can have been few men in the Force who did not realise, even if it were but dimly, that the prayers of their loved ones and of the people at home followed them. Nor were those prayers without avail. In all the works of R. L. Stevenson there is no passage of finer truth and comfort than the one in which he asserts that a generous prayer is never presented in vain. "The petition," he writes, "may be refused, but the petitioner is always, I believe, rewarded by some gracious visitation." It is those at home who have the harder part, for the mental torture and suspense is infinitely greater than mere physical discomfort, greater even than wounds and disablement. Perhaps in the confidence that their prayers are not in vain there may be for those loved ones something of comfort, something of that "gracious visitation."

## VI

### WITH THE FLYING CORPS

K. Hen. *Therefore let our proportions for these wars*
*Be soon collected, and all things thought upon*
*That may with reasonable swiftness add*
*More feathers to our wings.*

In all the departments of our fighting Services, hardly one of which has not been completely revolutionised since the outbreak of the war, no developments are more astonishing than those which have taken place in the Air Services. It seems only yesterday that Blériot made the first cross-Channel flight and so brought great headlines into the daily papers, "England no more an Island"; "Threat to our Island Supremacy," and such-like nonsense. To-day our men fly backwards and forwards over the Dover Straits as regularly as an infantry battalion goes on a route march. In the first year of the war there was accomplished in invention and flight more than could have been dreamed of in ten years of peace.

It is well that we should occasionally remind ourselves, and our Allies and neighbours, of facts like these. We are far too modest over our

nation's achievements, and since we so constantly belittle and criticise ourselves we can hardly be surprised that our friends and enemies should take us at our own valuation.

At Mons and during the Retreat, as far as the Aisne, in fact, the R.F.C. was represented by four little aeroplane squadrons, Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5. This meant about 60 machines, and the number averaged about the same until well into 1915. This was due to the fact that we lost so many machines in the earlier months, and the authorities were hard put to it merely to replace them without building additions. But it was not the number of aeroplanes which counted, it was the skill of the pilots and observers. And in this the R.F.C. has been second to none.

In those early days of which I write aeroplane work was in its infancy; no one seemed to realise its actual value, and certainly hardly a man can have foreseen those wonderful developments in the new arm which were so speedily to be in force. One looks back at the old days of peace manœuvres, trekking about on Salisbury Plain or through the Essex flats, and remembers how suspiciously one regarded aircraft. Co-operation between aircraft and guns, now of the first importance, was then hardly more than hinted at, and signalling was of the most cumbersome description, sheets or large flags spread out on the ground, and so forth.

Now it was as though a veil had suddenly been torn aside from the future. The swift and accurate information of the enemy movements which the R.F.C. sent in left general officers gaping with astonishment. When you are accustomed to rely upon laborious written dispatches brought in by cavalry patrol, dated perhaps an hour and a half before you receive them, it certainly is a little disconcerting to get a message literally from the sky to the effect that an enemy battery is *at that moment* unlimbering to come into action 4½ miles E.N.E. of where you are sitting. I remember how pleased General Smith-Dorrien was when an aeroplane squadron was definitely allotted to him at the opening of the Advance, and how amazed he was at the accurate information wirelessed or signalled down.

It may be noted here that although the R.F.C. had started poor in equipment, yet so rapidly did they make up leeway that we were actually the first of the armies in the field to make practical use of wireless and of photography. Wireless signalling from aircraft was used first, I believe, at the Aisne. The arming of aircraft came later, and it was after the Force had got round to Flanders that the first Lewis gun was mounted. Until then it was a rifle or revolver, and not always these.

But to return for a moment to the Retreat.

Photograph: Lizbett & Ivy, Ltd.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR DAVID HENDERSON

Like every other arm of the Service, the R.F.C. was working under new and untried conditions of warfare. No one could guess just what the German Flying Corps would be like :—how fast were their machines; how were they armed; would their men fight, and so on. Thus on the very first day our airmen went out, and, as General Henderson remarked, no one at H.Q. could tell whether any of them would be seen again. However, to the General's relief, all returned safely.

One fact was very soon established, the German was not out to fight. With the enemy, as with us, observation was the main thing. And as soon as our men got their air-legs (if there is such a term) the reports they brought back were invaluable. Within two or three days they had begun to mark down the character and direction of every single enemy column.

It was entirely due to our R.F.C., and the fact must never be forgotten, that von Kluck's big turning movement to the south-east from just before Paris was discovered in good time. The news was at once sent on to General Joffre, and the Allied attack at the Marne was the result. A momentous and historical piece of observation work and a big feather in the cap for the Corps. It adds another to the list of instances where the fate of an Army, some-

times the issue of a campaign, has been decided by a single scout keeping his eyes open and making a correct deduction from what he has seen.[1]

There are so many stories of plucky observation work and hair-breadth escapes one might tell. We lost many machines, but somehow or other the pilot would generally turn up in a day or two in our lines after an adventurous journey from behind the enemy's.

A machine would come down crippled. Word was got back to the R.F.C. H.Q., and a fast motor-car with a couple of mechanics was sent up to the scene of the accident. Here the men would work for all they were worth until an advance patrol of enemy cavalry hove in sight. If they could get the "old 'bus" going in time—all right. If they couldn't the engine would be picked up and carried off in the car from under the very noses of the disappointed Germans.

The aeropark (may I coin the word?) and Corps H.Q. had many a lively moment during the Retreat. When units were continually being left to shift for themselves and escape as best they could, H.Q., awaiting the return of over-

[1] The battle of Sadowa, for instance, where a single German scout discovered the Austrian Army in an unexpected position, with the result that the German line of attack was immediately altered and with complete success.

due machines, would often find themselves in a very unhealthy situation. Like the old A.S.C. 'bus drivers (you will remember them in the earlier volume), they were not armed and prepared for defence. So on several occasions the R.F.C. lorries were converted into a kind of Boer laager, while the remaining officers and men would stand to with any weapon that came handy. There was rarely, if ever, a protecting force to help them, but they always got away somehow, slipped through the ranks of the retirement, and started in again somewhere ahead.

Here is a striking little piece of observation work which illustrates admirably the skill and courage of the R.F.C. There was a certain Flight Commander (now, I believe, a distinguished General officer) who went up one day on an observing "stunt." He brought back a piece of valuable information which no one would believe.

"Righto," said he, "I'll go and have another look."

In due time he returned, made an excellent landing, and stepped out of his machine. It was seen that she was simply riddled with bullet holes.

"Yes, it's all right," he reported, "it *was* the Nth Regiment."

"Good lord, man, what the devil have you been up to?" they asked him.

"Well," said he, lighting a cigarette, "you're such a lot of unbelieving beggars that I had to make sure. I just landed in the same field and had a look at the number on their tunics. Had rather a job starting again, but they're rotten shots."

By such deeds of cool-headed daring is the tradition of a Service created. We speak with pride of the glorious tradition of the Navy, of the gallant deeds and noble chivalry of our seamen; achievements and aspirations which through the centuries have welded into a perfect whole that Spirit of the Navy which lives with us to-day. But the Air Service, born but yesterday, seems already to have grown old in wisdom and achievement. Yet we can see the record and tradition of it being created day by day before our eyes. The first amazing adventure in the new element is within the memory of each one of us.

So swiftly do the events of this war crowd upon us that we are apt to forget the great debt which we owe to those gallant gentlemen, adventurers all, who created the Flying Corps—men who, like Frobisher and Drake, Raleigh and Hawkins, went a-voyaging in their frail cockleshells through unknown, uncharted seas to dare everything for England's sake. If it is those young lads of ours fresh from school who are so worthily maintaining for us this new-born

tradition, remember that it was the pioneers, the old officers who created it and made the Flying Corps. Amongst these Sir David Henderson must ever take pride of place. The first Colonel-Commandant of the Corps, he learned to fly during spare time snatched from his onerous duties as Director of Military Training, and so, with the outbreak of war, he had the proud privilege of commanding the first four little squadrons to go on active service. Nor must the name of Godfrey Paine, Commodore, R.N., be forgotten. As commandant of the Central Flying School during the critical years of the birth of the Corps it will be guessed how grave a responsibility was his in the training of the personnel.

It was many months before our lads (on the ground) learned to distinguish between the markings on the various machines; to decide which aeroplanes were ours, French, or German. The consequence was that whenever an aeroplane sailed over, everyone would start firing away at her as hard as he could and with any weapon that came handy. Of course, no one had the least idea how to shoot at such a target, save perhaps officers who knew something about rocketing pheasants coming over tree-tops in a high wind. But that didn't matter. Orders from G.H.Q. had stated quite

plainly that all enemy aeroplanes were to be fired at. And as you couldn't tell which were enemy aeroplanes you decided that it was better not to run any risk in missing a possibility. So you fired, and somewhere in the direction of the machine. I have even seen an old woman in the street throwing stones.

But they were fine sportsmen those flying men of ours. It certainly is annoying when you are just dipping down for a good landing in your own lines to be greeted with volleys of rifle fire from your own friends. Yet apart from a little grousing if the petrol tank had been shot through, or some other like mishap had been caused, they took it all in excellent heart.

Orders were not to fight if you had any special job on hand. If you had to fight, then do it behind the enemy lines. But sometimes the temptation was too great to resist. One particularly thrilling encounter I remember at the Aisne, an encounter which should rank as historic, for it definitely established once and for all the superiority of our flying men over those of the enemy.

One of our men, I believe it was Lieutenant (now Flight Commander) N. C. Spratt, R.F.C., was returning from over the enemy's lines. It was a warm, sunny day, with barely a cloud in the sky. When well within our lines another aeroplane was seen following the first: whether it

was friend or foe no one could tell. The second machine was perhaps a mile behind the first when Spratt realised that he was being chased.

With a sharp pull on the "joy stick" Spratt began to climb. Then a steep "bank" over, and in a few seconds, it seemed, Spratt had turned to meet the pursuer. It was an enemy after all.

The firing at the aeroplanes ceased as if by some magic command. No sound now save the whir of the propellers humming like a gigantic sewing machine. From above it must have been a curious sight, those hundreds of white, upturned faces as the great audience gazed spell-bound at the combatants.

Spratt went straight for his man like a hawk at a fieldfare. Men held their breath for the crash which seemed inevitable. But, almost on his quarry, Spratt suddenly dived beneath, swung upwards in a climb, and was over the enemy. Faintly was heard the crack of a revolver.

Then followed such an exhibition of flying, of this new mastery of the air, as made each man grip his fellow by the arm and catch his breath at the sheer wonder of it. Over and under, loops and banks, Spratt manœuvred his machine. Now she hung poised, almost motionless—so one fancied—then she seemed to hold the air, tail on, beating with swift wings. With

a sudden dive she would dart away to return and harass her enemy once again with her incredible evolutions.

The end came suddenly. The German had had enough. Turning, he fled in fear from this superhuman enemy. Spratt, with yells of laughter, followed. On, on into the vague distance the two tiny specks vanished from sight. And the hundreds below who had watched spellbound threw their caps into the air and yelled themselves hoarse.

Half an hour afterwards, as dusk was falling, an aeroplane winged her way back to the aeropark. Softly she nosed to the ground, taxied her distance and stopped. A few mechanics ran up to attend to her wants. Spratt hoisted himself out, to lean against the machine shaking with laughter. A brother officer came swiftly across to him.

"So it was you, was it, you old beggar!" he exclaimed. "Did you finish him?"

Spratt shook his head, still laughing.

"Good lord, why not?"

"Hadn't got a gun," said Spratt.

It was, however, the moral effect which counted on this occasion, and that had been great. Our man had put the fear of God into the Boche, and from that day onwards we knew that our flying men were the masters. The

Boche wouldn't fight. That superiority they have never lost, despite the pessimistic head-waggings of croakers at home. The Germans from time to time may produce a better engine, and so for a spell we may have to compete on somewhat unequal terms so far as equipment goes.

But it is not the engine or the machine or the gun which counts in the long run, it is the man in control. Again and again during this war has that fact been established, especially with the Fleet. The spirit and breed of race have ever risen triumphant over incredible disadvantages. That this should be so on the seas we naturally expect, for we are an island people and the tang of the salt is in the blood of us; the centuries-old tradition of sea heritage runs in the veins. It is a sea tradition with which no twenty-years-old Navy of landsmen can hope to compete.

But in the new element of the air we started on equal terms. If anything the Germans were ahead of us, and certainly in equipment. For some years they had been experimenting with all types of machines, both heavier and lighter than air. Yet, once again, they have failed. Once again they pinned their faith to the machine and neglected the human element. Germany has failed because Germany does not breed the men.

The gallant deed of Lieutenant Warneford, V.C., when

> In one brief crowded hour
> He drew the world's wide wonder and her dower
> Of breathless admiration,

was but typical of the deeds accomplished by our flying men every day that passes. They are made possible because untiring experiments and improvements are giving us the right engines and the best machines. But what avails the finest engineering skill if the right men are not at hand to pilot?

And so at the call of this new mistress England has once again shown to the world the blood that is in her. "Now these her princes are come home again," and with never a thought save that England calls has the budding flower of her manhood leaped to fight for her this new, strange warfare. Pricked by the sharp spur of adventure, as their fathers were before them,

> Almost they brush the splendour of the stars,
> And sway the low red lantern of the moon
> With wind-beats of swift wings.

Thus if it was the old officers who made the Flying Corps it is to the cool brains and gallant hearts of these boys of 18 or 19 years that the future destiny of the Air Service is entrusted. And the old officers will tell you with pride

how apt their pupils are, how quickly they learn, and of the glory of their achievement. The destiny of the Service is in safe hands. As with Captain Ball, Lieutenant Warneford, and many another, so

> While such deeds move
> An empire, while eyes glow, and wonder starts
> And old-time courage kindles in young hearts,
> Men will be found to die his lonely death.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the toast is:

"The Royal Air Services of His Majesty's Navy and Army."

Pray charge your glasses, and to the brim!

# VII

## BETWEEN WHILES

FLUELLEN. *I beseech you now, will you voutsafe me look you, a few disputations with you, as partly touching or concerning the disciplines of the war, in the way of argument, look you, and friendly communication.*

"BETWEEN whiles" is not perhaps a very happy title, for nothing took place during the Marne-Aisne days which was not essentially a part of this horrible business of War. Still there were, shall we say, lighter moments away from the sterner realities, and it was some of these which really suggested the heading.

Then, as now (three years later) the great topic of conversation was the eternal one of the primitive animal—Food. No sooner was one meal finished than you began wondering about the next and what you were going to get. You knew perfectly well, for it was always Bentos bully-beef or Maconochie's Mixture, but it was not unpleasant to pretend about it and order something really scrumptious. I remember Sir Ernest Shackleton once telling me that the same delightful game was a great help to him and his men in the Antarctic. The ideal dinner

menu they used to plan ran something like this:—item, a cup of nice hot oily fat; item, a boiled leg of pork with plenty of fat, pease pudding, etc.; item, a boiled treacle pudding; and a cup of strong cocoa to finish with.

The men seldom mapped out meals like that; their desires seemed to run in the direction of special dishes, "something a bit tasty like." The homely kipper, perhaps; a stuffed sheep's heart; a plate of whelks; fried fish and chips. And, oh, the fun there was in trying to make the motherly *patronnes* of cafés and estaminets understand about fish and chips.

"Bon soyer, mother," a hungry Tommy from London's wild-East remarked affably leaning over the counter, "pennorth o' fish and chips, please."

"Mais oui, monsieur, tout-de-suite," the good lady replied, not understanding a word.

"Wot did she say, chum?" said Tommy, turning to a pal.

"Dunno! Thought she said 'Moossoo was too sweet.'"

"Too sweet!" this in great astonishment. "Too sweet! Me? Wot, on 'er? My eye, chum, time we 'opped orf ahrt o' this. T'ain't arf a lively spot. My missus allus did tork a lot abaht them French 'ussies—torked frew the back of her neck, I fought she did. But turning on a bloke like this all of a suddin like—I'd

never a fort it of 'em. Wot abahrt them fish an' chips? Ain't we goin' to get none?"

"Better make yerself a bit pally like fust," advised his chum.

"O orlright, hif it's the custom o' the country, I'm on." And Private Thomas A., with some dim idea of acting up to Kitchener's famous parting words on the subject, promptly heaved himself on to the counter, reached over, placed an arm around the astonished *patronne*, and gallantly saluted the good dame upon the cheek.

"Veeve longtong cordiarl!" sang out Thomas A. No. 2, a cry which was re-echoed by a number of French poilus who had been amused spectators.

Madame was far too good-tempered to feel any particular resentment. If anything she was shyly pleased at the little act of gallantry. Unluckily, though, it did not have the effect of producing the fish and chips, and our friends had to be content with a glass of weak beer each. And French beer is not popular in the British Army.

By the way, so great was the demand for fish and chips that later, in Flanders, shops were actually opened in little towns and villages to the rear of the lines for the sale of that succulent if greasy combination—to Tommy's great content.

For a short spell something went wrong with the meat supply, and the edict went forth that every man was to be allowed two francs per day in lieu. The men were not to receive the actual cash, but purchase of rations to that amount was to be effected locally. In other words, we were to live on the country till supplies got into working order again.

The C.O. of one unit, who was rather a good caterer when put to it (no, fair reader, you need not smile; your charming sex has not a monopoly in these weighty matters), went one fine morning into a neighbouring town to purchase sheep. He was directed to a butcher's on the market square.

"Bonjour, monsieur! How much are your sheep per kilo, if I buy wholesale?"

"For you, monsieur; for ces braves garçons d'Anglais I will charge but three francs per kilo."

"Three francs! But that is outrageous, monsieur."

M. le boucher shrugged his shoulders. "Mais non, monsieur, it is a fair price. It is the price which has been fixed for the commune, and we cannot sell for less."

"But whoever heard of such a price? And who could have fixed it at that?"

"Pardon, monsieur, but it has been fixed by M. le maire himself."

"Oh, but I am sure M. le maire would not fix so high a price; it is unheard of." The C.O. waxed impatient.

"But yes, monsieur, it is certain. M. le maire is a worthy man who knows the value of these things."

"Oh, well," said the C.O. with resignation, "if it is so, I must go and see the mayor and talk to him myself. Will you have the kindness to direct me to his house?"

M. le boucher drew himself up with an air of splendid dignity, and, laying his hand upon his breast,

"I, monsieur; *I* am M. le maire," he said.

I do not suppose that our men thought their rations very remarkable, but to our French comrades the commissariat was a never-ending source of astonishment. It is a well-worn platitude by now to remark that never has an Army in the field been fed so luxuriously as ours, and that from the very first. The food was there if only the A.S.C. could get it up to the men. And to do the A.S.C. justice, they never failed save only when it was a sheer impossibility; and they did not often fail even then. It is true that the variety was not very large. We did get rather a surfeit of plum and apple jam, and fresh vegetables would have been most welcome (ye gods! fancy an army on active service grumbling

because fresh vegetables were not issued), but taking it all round we had every reason to be most grateful to the powers that were for their admirable foresight and arrangements.

It may seem a curious confession to make, but it was not until we got to the Aisne, when we were able to shake down a little, that I discovered that a beneficent Government supplied free rations to the officers as well as to the men. One was so accustomed to the paying of mess bills for food that it did not occur to me to regard conditions of active service as any different. It was sufficiently bewildering to be in receipt of a daily field allowance over and above the usual rate of pay, so that one quite cheerfully paid for such food as was obtainable. When, a few months later, the daily rate of officers' pay was raised all round I began seriously to study the lists of "best investments." It was very pleasant to find that you could now count upon a comfortable living wage in the Army.

The pay which the men received was another fact which used to astonish the French. To the poilu with his two sous a day (or is it one sou?), these men in khaki must have seemed like an army of millionaires. Among the thrifty French the reckless extravagance of the Englishman with his money when holiday-making on the Continent had long been a proverb. It seemed that our lads were now determined to live up to

the English reputation. And since they began with the firm conviction that a franc was of the same value as a shilling, that a five-franc note was the same as a five-shilling piece instead of being only a trifle over four shillings, it is easy to imagine the results.

It is easy, too, to see their unconscious point of view. A summer holiday on "the Continong," with the old tradition of the English milord in their blood. (Remember the thousands of pounds squandered in a week's holiday at Blackpool by Lancashire workers.) A shilling or half a crown would be thrown on the counter with an air of magnificence for a roll or a couple of eggs. The *patronne* was probably as ignorant of the value of the silver piece as the man himself, and whatever change was forthcoming the man would pocket without a thought. The temptation was too great, and within a week of the landing in France the thrifty shopkeepers were coining money wherever our men passed.

Pay for the men would be obtained from any Field Cashier whom one could discover, and we used to give them five francs each about every ten days. The N.C.O.'s would, of course, receive more according to rank. An officer could obtain five pounds at a time from the same source. It must have been a very ungrateful and responsible job that of a Field Cashier, especially in the early days when they were on

the move all the time. One incident well illustrates it.

The scene is a small A.S.C. officers' mess in a farmhouse near the Aisne. The C.O. and three other officers are having dinner. The door is suddenly thrown open and another officer appears.

"At last!" he exclaims breathlessly. "At last I've found you. Thank the Lord! *Where's my box?*" And he pants heavily into a chair.

The diners look at each other in astonishment.

"What on earth are you talking about?" says the C.O. "Have a drink?"

"My box. The one I gave you to look after."

"Box?" says the C.O.; "you didn't give me any box." The other officers shake their heads. "When was it, and what sort of box?"

The newcomer sat up in alarm. "On the Tuesday night at that little village after Mons. Don't you remember I asked one of your lot to take care of it for a few hours? When I came back you'd gone, and I've been trying to find out ever since what unit it was. For God's sake, don't say you haven't got it."

The C.O. shook his head and thought for a minute. Then, "Yes, I do seem to remember a sergeant bringing me a box. Said an officer had asked him to look after it. I took it on my

car for about a week, but I haven't seen it for some time. Hope it wasn't anything important."

"Important!"—the Field Cashier (for such he was) passed his hand over his forehead—"important! Oh, no, thanks; there was only about five thousand pounds in cash in it."

The C.O. whistled. "I say, I'm awfully sorry. I'll have a search made. It may have been put on one of the lorries."

A search was made, and an officer was sent back in a car through the villages, but nothing more was ever heard of box or money. A Court of Inquiry was duly held, with what result I do not know. But this was just one of a hundred similar incidents of which there was no time to take stock during those days of stress. The officer in question had found a Divisional Headquarters, and handed his box to the senior N.C.O. on duty for a couple of hours. He never dreamed (nor did anyone else) that the Division, and the Army, were then in imminent danger of being wiped out at any moment. And that was the little adventure of the Field Cashier and the Pay Chest.

It was extraordinary how little count one took of incidents like that. One of my own men, for instance, on the very first Sunday shot a comrade through the head with a revolver and killed him. A pure accident; he "didn't know

it was loaded." We kept the man under arrest for a week, but it was merely a farce under such conditions of hurried retreat. I recall the pathos of the incident because the victim of this misadventure had only half an hour before finished writing cheery letters to his wife and mother.

Between whiles we had an occasional court-martial or two. Not the interminable, red-tape variety of court-martial they have at home, but a shortened form properly adapted for active service; the Field General C.M. Again, until the Aisne was reached these were very few in number, for there was no chance of holding them when on the move. We shot a goodly number of spies, and there were a few cases where summary treatment had to be meted out to our own men. Every army has its black sheep, and it is absurd to pretend that ours was different from others in the field.

At the same time, one is happy to record that cases of the more serious crimes of active service were very rare indeed; some few were inevitable. For instance, during the first four months I heard of only three cases of looting. The culprits were very promptly dealt with. There were a very few cases of disobeying orders, and again, of course, an immediate example had to be made for the sake of discipline. Even cases of drunkenness were few

and far between, and that was rather astonishing in view of the weird drinks the men imbibed in the cafés in place of good, honest beer.

Courts-martial on active service are all very much alike; there is a minimum of writing, and cases are very quickly disposed of, if the president knows his business. One case, I remember, came to a very abrupt end—through enemy intervention.

The court (of three officers) had assembled in a small house a mile or so behind the front lines. A desultory gun-fire by the enemy had been going on since daybreak, but only a stray shell or two had fallen anywhere near the house.

The court was formally opened, and the three witnesses for the prosecution in the second case had ensconced themselves beside a neighbouring hedge to await their turn for giving evidence.

The first case was nearly at an end when a shell sailed over the house and burst about fifty yards beyond. A second burst some seventy yards short. The president quietly finished the case, and, opening the second, sent an orderly for the prisoner and the first witness for the prosecution. The prisoner was marched in and the court waited. A minute later the orderly returned. With face deathly white he saluted.

"Shell, sir! All the witnesses killed," he reported.

# VIII

## THE CROSSING OF THE AISNE

K. Hen. *Now set the teeth, and stretch the nostril wide;*
*Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit*
*To his full height!—On, on, you noblest English,*
*Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!*

It was on Saturday, September 12, that the Force reached the River Aisne, and never, never will anyone who was there forget the misery of that day. People at home reading despatches from the front may be told in half a dozen words that "the weather delayed further progress," or that "snow rendered operations difficult," and they murmur "Pity they're having such bad weather out there," and think little more about it. But to the men "out there" it means just everything.

You must picture, if you will, the various units, horse, guns and foot, as they came up that day to the south bank of the river; for it is only when you can see them in the mind's eye that you will begin to appreciate the sheer wonder of their continued achievement.

Remember that this was still the remnant of the Force which had fought through from Mons

and, without a break, had turned and fought back again. Two hundred odd miles of ceaseless fighting and marching, and through torrid heat alternating with drenching rain. Casualties not yet made good; lost or worn-out kit not yet fully replaced. The men, or a great number of them, were in rags, and that is just the truth of it.

During the few previous days the weather had been getting worse and worse. The climax came that Saturday in a steady downpour of heavy rain which did not stop for an hour. It seemed as though all the rain in the world had been concentrated in that valley. The roads became quagmires for all wheeled traffic, and transport and guns were everywhere held up.

The men left their bivouacs wet through; before half an hour had passed they had all got to that stage when nothing mattered. The orders were to make good the crossing of the river and hold the northern slopes. On that day no one, at G.H.Q. or in the Force, could have guessed what was before them, that it was the end of the Advance and the beginning of many weary months of hammering at a wall.

With the earliest misty dawn everyone was on the move, squelch, squelch through the mud. Teams strained at the guns, dragging them through the liquid glue away over fields of heavy soil wherein carriages sank wellnigh axle deep. Motor-cars with a ceaseless yonking of strident

horns thrust infantry aside. And the rain came down in torrents.

One battalion found a few dozen oat sacks in a granary. Wrapped round the shoulders they were at least a reasonable substitute for greatcoats, and there was a mad rush for them. Another company appeared looking like a gang of Chinese coolies with bundles of straw tied together and hung over the shoulders by way of capes. Disconsolate-looking cavalry horses, heads and tails tucked down, plodded heavily past, carrying riders who sat grimly in pools of water. Squelch, squelch, and down came the rain. Oh for a glass of hot rum and water, and a pipe of tobacco! Never mind; stick it, lads! The Sixth Division have landed; they are on their way up.

It was on this very day that we got the rumour about those Russians landing in the north of Scotland and being rushed down through England to take the Germans in the rear. The fact seemed so unlikely and improbable that it was quite generally believed, and the rumour had a very heartening effect. We didn't hear till later of the extraordinary sensation it caused at home amongst all classes, even down to the old lady whose son, a railway porter, had actually swept the snow out of the railway carriages.

About 7 a.m. General Allenby with his

cavalry had worked up to Braisne, a village some five miles south of the river. Quickly they drove out a small enemy force, but were unable to hold the village without support. This was forthcoming from some of the infantry of the 3rd Division. General Gough, too, with his Brigade (the regiments of a previous chapter) had another smart little affair with enemy infantry some three miles nearer to the river.

One may be excused from referring so frequently to those three gallant regiments under General Gough, but they did put the fear of God into the Germans. When there was a little job like that on hand it was not a case of sending for those lads to do it; they were generally on the spot and half-way through it by the time the need was realised.

Well, this time they just counted out some seventy Germans, captured 150 more, and then went on with their trek to the river. But the bridge at Vailly, with a strong battery of machine-guns to hold it, was too tough a nut to crack just then, so they exchanged a few shots and drew off out of range to await supports and guns.

Elsewhere, all along their sixteen-mile front, the Force pressed steadily forward. On the extreme right the lads of Sussex, Northampton and Lancashire; on the extreme left that splendid little Third Corps which we watched

crossing the Marne at La Ferté. Squelch they went through the mud and rain, but it was the right direction, and—we're all going to be home by Christmas. Cheero!

But apart from the distressing condition of the troops, the bad weather was a severe handicap to the Flying Corps. Our flying men were away and aloft as usual, but observation was simply impossible. Thus the several H.Q.'s had to send their troops blindly forward, and trust more or less to luck, and no one knew what we were up against. I wonder what the Force would have done that day and the next had they known. Gone ahead just the same, I suppose. But we didn't know, and this is what it was.

The Aisne about there was sixty or seventy yards broad, in flood and very deep. There was just one possible bridge for the whole front; all the remainder had been destroyed. About a mile north from the river the ground began to climb to a high plateau which the Germans had prepared as a strong defensive position. It was a natural line of defence; they had reconnoitred every yard of it years before, had prepared in secret their big gun positions all along the height, and so soon as they had swept over the country in their advance they had set to work upon it against such a contingency as the present.

Few facts of the war can have revealed in stronger light than this the military organisation and forethought of the Prussian General Staff. I should imagine that there was not an officer on that Staff, from William Hohenzollern downwards, who doubted for a moment that their war plans against France would have been precisely fulfilled within their scheduled time—that Paris would have fallen, the French Armies been destroyed, and terms of peace dictated in time to turn upon Russia in the same way before the Holy Empire had had time fully to mobilise. And yet, despite that conviction, the Prussian Staff had worked out the defensive strategy of the Aisne—in case.

Our flying men could not yet tell us all this, and even when the crossing of the river and the subsequent attacks were in progress it was with the greatest difficulty that they were able to discover the German gun positions. The general impression was that the enemy were going on with their retirement, and it was with this idea in mind that the G.O.C.'s pushed ahead.

It was not until the afternoon of the 12th that the several Commands realised that it was going to be a difficult task. Our advance patrols arrived at the river at various points, and were promptly held up everywhere. Reports were sent back, and the S.O.S. call went out for the Royal Engineers. And it was then that this

splendid Corps started upon and accomplished one of the finest pieces of work in its history.

Lieutenant J. A. C. Pennycuick (now Captain and D.S.O.) began it by floating out on some kind of raft (no one quite knows how it was done), and drifting down stream to within 100 yards of the bridge at Missy in order to reconnoitre. He could not well escape being seen, and the Germans as soon as they had recovered from their astonishment blazed away at him as hard as they could. But, to quote Admiral Beatty's delicious remark upon a similar adventure,[1] "this in no way interfered with the clarity of his report." Pennycuick got back safely to tell how the bridge was just a wreck, while the remnant of it was strongly held with the inevitable battery of machine-guns.

Similar reconnaissance was successfully carried out within the next couple of hours at all the points of possible crossing. The Sappers saw what they had to do, and promptly tackled the job with that thoroughness and gay insouciance which have ever marked their work.

The enemy had all the ranges registered for their overwhelming mass of guns, and they were fully prepared to hold up by every means the crossing of the British. But that fact didn't

[1] Reconnaissance by a sea-plane flying at 900 ft. under heavy fire from four enemy cruisers. *Battle of Jutland Bank official despatches.*

bother the Sappers. It was up to them to provide the means of crossing, and they intended to do it. Within forty-eight hours they had finished the task.

Within forty-eight hours, working under the direct fire of the enemy's massed artillery and machine-guns, the Sappers had constructed or sufficiently repaired no fewer than fourteen bridges along a fifteen-mile front and across a seventy-yards broad river in flood.

Upon such a feat as this any comment is impossible. One can only record it in the simplest words, and leave the details to the imagination.

The misery and depression of that pouring wet day hung over the troops like a leaden pall all through the night. Towards evening a gale sprang up to add to the discomfort (if it were possible). All the day the men had been halted under arms awaiting the orders to go forward. They had started off gaily enough, but the check had soon come, and that meant moral depression as well as physical discomfort. With nightfall an attempt was made to secure some shelter in the neighbouring villages and barns, but there was little enough available. And the rain poured down unceasingly. Food supplies temporarily broke down, for the roads by this time were impassable for transport. It was a dreadful night, and how the men saw it through, coming as the climax of all their privations, remains a

mystery. The wonder is that most of the Force were not on the sick list with dysentery and similar complaints.

And yet before the following night had passed the whole of the British Force, with the exception of half a dozen Brigades, had crossed the Aisne. They had "made good" once more. Ah! the wonder of the "contemptible little Army." Never has the world seen such troops. Will it ever again?

To some of the men in the 11th Brigade (Third Corps again) fell the honour of being the first across. Do you remember their nocturnal expedition on the river at La Ferté when they were chaffed by the Jocks? The memory of it had cut deep, and this time they were determined to make a clean job of it. They succeeded admirably, and by 3 o'clock on the Sunday morning they had pushed across on some rafts from near Venizel, and were snugly settled on the other side. A little later the remainder of the 11th Brigade, as well as the 12th, were over hard upon their heels and pushing ahead up the hill.

Thus had the first troops won the northern bank. Their task had been comparatively easy. Not so with the remainder. But I can find no words in which to tell of the achievement of these and the following days. The genius of some great painter displayed upon a mighty

canvas might perhaps suggest the scene; no author's pen can do so. So would one cry:

> O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention!

The dawn of that Sunday, the 13th, broke dull and misty after the rain-sodden night, and the first gleam of daylight came as a welcome relief to the men after the depressing hours of darkness. All down the valley the fog-wreaths tumbled and danced before the dull booming of the guns on the northern heights, and shells tore their way through the heavy air to burst with deadly monotony along and over the southern bank.

The Cavalry and Horse Gunners, with an occasional battery of field-guns, are up in the front on the very fringe of the shell storm. Pass down the horse-lines, and you will see the men already hard at work wisping and hand-rubbing, striving to work up the circulation and get some warmth into their dumb comrades before the business of the day begins. They know well enough that it is the first hour or so that will tell.

A little apart from the horses of one squadron are picketed three or four officers' chargers. "Well looked after," you will exclaim; "they've actually got horse-rugs." Look a little closer, and you will notice that the

"horse-rugs" are of rather superior quality. They are the officers' great-coats.

Most of the gunners and drivers have found their night's shelter under their guns and wagons. Rather risky, this, for the horses, tethered to the wheels, will probably kick you during the night. At least one driver fell in that morning with two black eyes and a bleeding mouth.

"If you want to fight," said the No. 1, "why can't you wait for them Germans?"

"Carn't 'elp it, Sergeant," protested the driver; "it was that there 'Ermione. She went and trod on my face in the dark—the old blighter!" he added affectionately, as he slipped in the bit.

And "'Ermione," nuzzling into his hand, was rewarded with a piece of cold bacon which she didn't like and promptly dropped in the mud.

All the C.O.'s have got their orders. The various H.Q. Staffs have spent a very busy night working out the arrangements for the advance. You can see them, some in leaky barns, others in tapestried drawing-rooms of lordly châteaux, one and all poring over large-scale maps, fitting in this and that report, checking dispositions of troops. Right back to G.H.Q. at Fère-en-Tardenois, fifteen miles to the rear, run the threads of communication.

"On that morning," says Sir John French, "I ordered the British Forces to advance and make good the Aisne."

Little enough it seems when resolved into that single paragraph. But it indicates as nothing else can the supreme confidence which the Commander-in-Chief had in his troops.

The British guns all along the lines have begun their response to the enemy's heavier metal. Effective firing was very difficult, for in many cases battery commanders had but a vague idea what their targets were. The German gun positions on the heights were most cleverly concealed, and until fire was concentrated just over the river crossings a great deal of ammunition was wasted.

On the extreme right the First Corps had to make a double crossing; first a canal which runs parallel to the Aisne, and then the river itself. Just by the village of Bourg another canal runs down from the north, crosses the Aisne by an aqueduct, and enters the first canal at a "hair-pin" angle. This was the spot assigned to the First Division, and they had a pontoon bridge, just constructed, and the aqueduct by which to cross.

A small advance patrol has felt its way forward to the crossing. Good! The enemy have rather neglected that aqueduct, and they have left but a weak post to hold it. Word goes back

to the batteries, and nearly all the available guns there are switched on. But the enemy, too, know what is going to happen, and a deluge of shrapnel and high explosive is poured down over the river and banks.

The first to the pontoons was a company of one of the County regiments. Officers ahead, over they went. It was fairly easy going, but the shrapnel took its toll, and perhaps a quarter of the little advance force went down. The bank was quickly won, and our guns by this time had settled accounts with the trifling enemy rear-guard on the aqueduct hard by. The cavalry followed close upon the advance company, the boats of the bridge swaying and dipping as they crossed. But the horses are long since accustomed to such a roadway, even though under fire, and the men get them safely over. Once on the bank the squadrons form up as though on the drill-ground, and it is only a few minutes before they are off and away to round up or drive ahead scattered parties of the enemy. By the evening they had occupied three or four of the villages five miles north of the river.

For the remainder of the Division the crossing was fairly easy. The aqueduct was, if I remember, intact save for a few broken girders and supports, and the Sappers worked unceasingly to strengthen it and the pontoons. Thus this Division got rather ahead of the rest of the

Force, and the effect of this was seen during the following days.

A little farther to the west the Second Division had a stiff tussle before they could make good. I wish I could give you a picture of the shattered bridge that Sunday morning as General Haking's Brigade swarmed across. They were the Worcesters, the Highland Light Infantry, the Connaught Rangers, and the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry.

There was just a single girder and a tangle of wreckage for them to clamber over. On the far side lay the Germans with maxims, while up on the heights the enemy gunners worked hard to finish their task of destruction. For once their gunnery failed them, but it was a near thing. Just as the first of our men set foot on the girder a well-placed high explosive shell burst close under the far end, and twisted up still more the slender support; and that was the last which seemed to do any real damage.

The big difficulty about that crossing was that you could not rush it. Under fire, when the blood is up and a position has to be won, there is no thought of holding back if it can be done at the double. But to clamber in single file across a steel plank, over a swollen river with shrapnel and H.E. hissing and plumping all round—that calls for steady nerves.

There was one big man, in the Worcesters,

I think, whose great strength served him and a comrade well that morning. The man immediately in front got badly hit, staggered for an instant, and was on the point of falling over into the river when—

"Hold up, chum!" called the big man, grabbing him by the belt. With a heave he got him round the waist, and tucked him up under his arm. How he got across the remaining fifty yards of that narrow slippery path burdened with his kit, his rifle and a full-grown man with all *his* kit remains a mystery. But he did it somehow by sheer grit; needless to add he was promptly dubbed "Blondin" by his pals.

The next crossing farther west was at Chavonne. This fell to the Brigade of Guards under General Scott-Kerr, and was probably the hardest of any; this, and the crossing at Condé. At both these points the northern heights fall sharply down to the river bank; thus the character of the ground helped the enemy very materially in their defence. At Bourg and Pont-Arcy the northern side was comparatively level for some few miles.

If you were to ask any half-dozen officers in the Force to tell you which they considered the best all-round regiment out there, I would venture a wager that you would receive, as I did, the same reply from each. And that answer would be "the Guards." Just that. Not the

Irish Guards or Grenadiers, but "the Guards." And in the original Force, where there seemed nothing to choose between the various arms and regiments, that is surely a very remarkable tribute.

"For the press of knights," says Emerson, "not every brow can receive the laurel." And I have often tried to analyse that indefinable quality about the Brigade of Guards which has given them a place apart, even in that so great a "press of knights." I think that if I had to define it in a single word, I should say it was "finish." You will find that quality pre-eminent in everything about them. Their uniform and kit are always a trifle more neat and smart than their neighbours'; their bivouac or camp lines a trifle more straight and well ordered; their movements on parade carry a trifle more spring; and so all through the list.

To the lay mind these factors are of trivial account. But to the sailor or the soldier they spell the word "discipline." And discipline, with all that it involves, is perhaps the greatest asset in modern warfare.

That crossing of the Aisne at Chavonne was the hardest, and, by mere chance, it was allotted to the Brigade of Guards. How they carried it after nearly twelve hours of hard fighting, eventually crossing in boats, and then stormed a strong position the other side, is a story which

will rank as one of the proudest in all their magnificent record. By sunset they, too, had "made good the Aisne."

To tell of the work of the remaining Brigades on this day is only to repeat incidents already set down, for these are but typical of the whole. It was work in which all arms nobly played a part: the individual and collective gallantry and skill of the Sappers; the unceasing vigilance and support of the Gunners which made the crossing possible; the superb tenacity and gay courage of the Infantry which carried them over and through every obstacle.

By nightfall the Men of Mons had "made good the Aisne" according to orders.

# The Roll

OF

# THE SIXTH INFANTRY DIVISION

*General Officer Commanding*—Major-General J. L. Keir.

## 16th Infantry Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—Brigadier-General C. Ingouville-Williams.

1st Batt. East Kent Regt.
1st Batt. Leicestershire Regt.
1st Batt. Shropshire L.I.
2nd Batt. York and Lancaster Regt.

## 17th Infantry Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—Brigadier-General W. R. B. Doran.

1st Batt. Royal Fusiliers
1st Batt. North Staffordshire Regt.
2nd Batt. Leinster Regt.
3rd Batt. The Rifle Brigade.

## 18th Infantry Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—Brigadier-General W. N. Congreve, V.C.

1st Batt. West Yorks
1st Batt. East Yorks
2nd Batt. Notts and Derby Regt.
2nd Batt. Durham L.I.

CAVALRY (attached)
19th Hussars (one squadron)

## ROYAL ARTILLERY

*R.F.A. Batteries*—21, 42, 53 (IInd Bgde.); 110, 111, 112 (XXIVth Bgde.); 24, 34, 72 (XXXVIIIth Bgde.).
*Howitzer*—43, 86, 87 (XIIth Bgde.)
*Heavy Battery R.G.A.*—24.

## ROYAL ENGINEERS

12th and 38th Field Companies. 6th Signal Company.

# IX

## AT THE AISNE

BARD. *On, on, on, on, on! to the breach, to the breach!*
NYM. *Pray thee, corporal, stay: the knocks are too hot; and, for mine own part, I have not a case of lives: the humour of it is too hot, that is the very plain-song of it.*

WITH the passage of the Aisne there began the last great fight of the Men of Mons, the original "contemptible" Army. For four days and nights it lasted with never a break, and all that mortal men could do the officers and men accomplished. Yard by yard they won their way up the plateau, and when they could do no more there they held their ground. Their attack passed into a defence. Then, with the imperishable tradition of the British infantry, was formed once again "the thin red line."

Hour after hour, day after day, the waves of German infantry rolled down upon them. Hour after hour the British stood to meet them, broke them and hurled them back in disorder. Pounded night and day by the German guns, to which our own could barely reply, they clung to their positions. Was a point momen-

tarily lost, a counter-attack would instantly be launched and the position won again.

There they fought while their ranks grew ever thinner, and still the remnant struggled on. That little line, with the cavalry all in, held and fought the enemy to a standstill. For with the fifth day of the battle the German attacks had grown weaker and weaker and the dreary dawn of trench warfare had come.

It was the last day's fighting for the original Expeditionary Force, composed as it had been from the early stages of the Retreat. The Sixth Division was on its way up from the coast, and on September 16 it had come into line. Of course, this is no more than a trivial point of sentimental record. But you who read will perhaps appreciate the feeling of pride which was in the hearts of the "old stagers" at having seen the thing through from the beginning.

And the difference, in appearance, manner and so forth, between the new-comers and the old stagers was almost laughable. Can you not imagine the contrast? There was no possibility of mistaking one for the other, although the lads of the Sixth did their best in the way of "make-up."

With the exception of one Irish battalion they were all English county regiments; Kent, Leicester, Durham, Shropshire, Yorkshire and

others. And how fresh and young-looking they seemed beside the war-stained veterans of a month! Such nice clean faces and such nice clean uniforms. And overcoats! real overcoats they had.

"Hullo, mate!" (can you not hear the old stager?) "Come up to join the picnic, have you? Proper picnic this, I give you my word. Why, *we* ought to be paying the blooming Government for giving us such a jolly old picnic. An' they're paying *us*—five francs a fortnight. Robbery, that's what it is, downright robbery to take the money—that's what I sez. You'll see, my lad, after you've been out 'ere a bit. You won't like to take it."

The new-comer murmured something which might have been an expression of somewhat doubtful gratitude.

"Why, mate," the veteran continued, starting backwards in astonishment, "whatever are them things you've got on your feet? *Boots?* 'Ere, let's have a look at 'em. My Gawd! and laces, too, in 'em! Real laces! Leather, ain't they? Gawd!" and he lapsed into incoherence.

"'Ere," he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you, chum. Them things ain't no good to you. Wot you want is a nice shiny German 'elmet. Or one of them long stickers wot them cavalry o' theirs uses. That's wot you want.

A soovenir like, wot you can send 'ome to yer best gal. Boots! wot's the good of boots? She don't want boots, she wants one o' them 'elmets so's she can do a bit o' swank to her pals on a Sunday night."

The new hand was obviously becoming impressed. In fact, he had been touched upon a very tender spot.

"That's all right then, mate," decided the veteran. "I've got the very thing for 'er. Got a proper dab o' blood on it too, it 'as, an' a regular cut in it where I got the blighter clean through the napper. Dirt cheap it is for them boots, but I'll let you 'ave it cos you're a new chum—see? Come along o' me and we'll 'and over."

Meekly the new chum followed, and the bargain was sealed with a "petit caporal" apiece (Woodbines were no more then). But the new chum was not so happy over his bargain the next morning when charged before his C.O. with "losing by neglect his personal equipment," and that shiny German helmet cost him dear by the time he had finished with all the necessary formalities.

However, it was not very long before the new chums had become broken in to the manners and customs of active service, but it took longer for them to get the hang of the fighting. A brand-new company going into the firing-

line for the first time is apt to be pretty nervous, especially when it is trench work. A year later on the Flanders side, when things had settled down into a regular routine, a new battalion would go through endless rehearsals of every phase of trench work before it went up into the front line. The only new thing they then had to face was the target hitting them back.

But at the Aisne there was no opportunity for rehearsals. Every man was wanted, and badly too. So after a very few days in reserve new battalions were sent up to replace some which had suffered the most severely.

There was one new half-battalion which took over a certain very warm corner of hastily dug trenches. They didn't like it, and it is no use pretending they did. Who shall blame them? It was a wet, misty dawn when they first found themselves peering anxiously along their rifles at the enemy lines only some 150 yards away. They were cold, they were rather hungry, and the last few hours, when they had been relieving their comrades, had been trying ones for the nerves. So that there were a good handful of them to echo the remark in *Henry V.*, "Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety."

And the enemy, with that uncanny secret

service of theirs, knew perfectly well that new, untried companies had taken the place of the old guard. "We'll just give them an hour to settle down," said the Germans, "and then at the early dawn we'll have them out of it."

And that is exactly what happened. The officers were probably as nervous as the men, but they kept a tight grip on themselves not to show it. A few minutes' heavy gunfire came almost as a relief, for they knew it was but the prelude for what was coming.

"Stick it, lads; here they come." And with the words down rolled the wave upon them. The front ranks melted away before the heavy rifle fire, but there wasn't quite the same quality about it as usual. You cannot get that nice accuracy and tremendous speed with your rifle when you are feeling cold and wet and rather nervous and everything is new.

So the wave swept on down the slope, over the parapet, and into the trenches. The new chums now were fighting for their lives. One vast confusion of mad stabbing, bashing with rifle-butts, fists, revolvers, anything. Still the wave poured into the trench, flooded it, swallowed up the defenders, stayed there. The trench was won.

The crash of the attack had come to the Brigade Commander a few hundred yards away. He had expected it, had hoped that all would

be well—but he was prepared. Curtly he raps out an order—"The Hampshires will retake Trench W"—the order is scribbled down, signed, and a Staff officer is on his way with it before a couple of minutes have passed.

The Hampshires, in support, are finishing a somewhat sketchy breakfast and feeling in their pockets for any stray fag that might have worked into the lining. Sergeant Stephens is sitting on a little mound gloomily listening to the noise of the attack. Suddenly he jumps to his feet.

"Fall in, B Company," he calls. "We'll be wanted up there in a minute," he adds for the benefit of one of his corporals.

B Company snatches up its rifles, looks to it that bayonets are fixed and all magazines charged. Within a few minutes the Company commander appears, running.

"We're to counter-attack Trench W," he remarks cheerily. "Any pistol ammunition yet?"

"No, sir," says Sergeant Stephens. "Had orders to throw the last lot into the river. You remember, sir."

His captain does remember, and curses again. There had been something wrong with the ammunition originally issued, and orders had been sent round to throw any remaining into the nearest river. For a week or more officers had been without any.

"What's that lot up there in W?" asks a private.

"Don't know. Think it's the Blankshires. Just come up," replies the next number.

"Well, why the hell can't they do the job 'stead of rounding us up?"

"Stop that talking," cuts in a corporal sharply.

The captain casts a quick glance over his company and hurries back to report "ready." A few more minutes and they are off with two other companies, cutting out into extended order as they advance.

The German guns from the very beginning have been plastering with shrapnel and H.E. all the ground just to the south of the won trenches in anticipation of counter-attacks. The gunners and officers cannot see for the mist, but the ranges are registered and so they carry on.

The Hampshires have been through this sort of thing before, and while one never gets really used to it they are not inclined to worry overmuch. The ground is against them, and it is very heavy moving up over that wet, chalky soil.

Just as the mighty breakers crash high upon the beach and roll back in wavelets over the pebbles and sand, so does the counter-attack develop. The enemy have attacked in heavy

masses, overwhelming almost by sheer weight. The British counter-attack in thin, extended lines, skirmishing forward. Here and there with a smothered moan men drop and lie still, but the rest do not falter. Now the captain is down, two bullets through the thigh. A subaltern leaps to his place to lead on the company.

Nearer now—50 yards, is it?—and the Hampshires tighten up for the spring. Have you seen an Irish hunter tuck his legs beneath him for a stiff hedge with a broad, peaty stream beyond? So the Hampshires.

Two or three little seconds and they have struck home. Still the shells burst beyond the trench, but within it there is hardly a shot. It is the steel now. The second line is up and in with their comrades. Again the vast confusion, but the end comes more quickly. The Germans do not enjoy the steel.

A few minutes and a hoarse cheer tells the Brigadier what he has been waiting for. The counter-attack has succeeded. The Hampshires have made good. Half an hour later another little party of German prisoners is on its way down to the river and G.H.Q.

Just one incident out of fifty like it. The whole affair had begun and ended within half an hour. I make no attempt to trace the

course of this Battle of the Aisne, I can only suggest by an illustration or two the general character of it. Perhaps you will then turn to Sir John French's despatch or to one or other of the published histories and read between the lines. For instance, in the official despatch the course of the fighting of these four days is very clearly outlined, and with the exercise of a little imagination it is easy to follow.

It will be remembered that the 1st Division was able to cross the Aisne very rapidly, and so to push forward in advance of the remainder of the Force. This is what Sir John French says about the value of it:

"The action of the First Corps on this day [Monday the 14th], under the direction and command of Sir Douglas Haig, was of so skilful, bold and decisive a character that he gained positions which alone have enabled me to maintain my position for more than three weeks of very severe fighting on the north bank of the river."

And again: "Throughout the Battle of the Aisne this advanced and commanding position was maintained, and I cannot speak too highly of the valuable services rendered by Sir Douglas Haig and the Army Corps under his command. Day after day and night after night the enemy's infantry has been hurled against him in violent counter-attack which has never on any one

occasion succeeded, whilst the trenches all over his position have been under continuous heavy artillery fire."

I have reproduced those two passages because they seem to me to sum up in the most fitting language the general situation of those days. Above everything the Battle of the Aisne, both the first four days and the trench warfare which followed, was fought through, and the enemy held by the regimental officers and their men. Strategy and tactics went by the board, for there was no opportunity to use them. It was a soldiers' battle pure and simple, and never in the history of the British Army have officers and men fought with more splendid grit and determination.

As I write Sir Douglas Haig's great offensive of Easter, 1917, is in progress, and I am continually reading in the Press that "*now*" or "*at last*" our infantry are beating, or "have got the measure of" the German infantry.

I wonder if editors can realise how foolish such statements really are. Not only are they foolish, but they are actually a libel on the men who were bearing the burden and heat of the day at a time when the men of the New Armies were sitting at office desks, or otherwise carrying on their peace-time vocations.

Our infantry have "had the measure of"

the German infantry from the very first day at Mons. There they proved themselves undoubtedly the better in face of overwhelming strength both in men and artillery, and through the months that followed they never lost that superiority. Nor was it affected by such incidents as that just related. Is the work of the immortal Seventh Division at Ypres already forgotten?

Only yesterday I came across this sentence in the "Memories" of Admiral Lord Beresford, writing of the fight at Abu Klea in the Sudan War of 1884. "Once more," he says, "the British soldier proved that no troops in the world can face his musketry." It was the same at Crécy and Agincourt with our bowmen, and so it has been from the wars of Marlborough and Wellington down to the present.

And our cheerful newspaper editors express surprise! Well, I, for one, have no patience with the man who finds every country better than his own and is for ever making unenviable comparisons. There is far too much of it with our publicists, and it is not to be wondered at that Germans and others constantly denounce us on the score of hypocrisy.

Needless to add, the incidents of individual heroism in this soldiers' battle were almost endless. As always, dozens will never be recorded.

But some we have which can never be forgotten so long as the recital of great deeds can thrill a people.

There was Captain W. H. Johnston, R.E., who, single-handed, kept a couple of rafts crossing and recrossing the river under heavy fire. On the forward journey he carried ammunition, on the return he brought back wounded.

There was a private of the Highland Light Infantry, G. Wilson, who, again single-handed, attacked and captured a German machine-gun, actually shooting or stabbing seven of the enemy to take it.

But one of the most heroic exploits of all has, so far as I know, not been recorded, and I have never been able to discover the name of the man, another Scotsman, nor the regiment.

An advance guard of Scots with a maxim was on outpost duty on a bridge over one of the waterways just north of the Aisne. The post was rather an isolated one, but supports were coming up.

The advanced sentry suddenly doubled back to the post and reported a body of German infantry coming down the road. The maxim was manned, and with the appearance of the leading enemy files fire was opened.

For a second or two the enemy halted. Then they charged, with another rank firing over their heads from higher ground.

The gun detachment ground away for some fifteen seconds, when both men were killed instantaneously. Another rushed forward. He was dropped almost at once. One by one the men on that little post went down rifle to shoulder, working trigger and bolt till the end came.

Two now are left, one badly hit. "We'll gang oot decently," cried the other and leaped to the maxim, picked it up and ran across the bridge towards the enemy. *Zip-zip* went the bullets all round him; then a couple in the arm and one through the leg.

Staggering forward against the parapet he brought the gun into action once again. Bullets splashed against the gun, against the stones, but he worked steadily on.

"Hold them, Jamie," came the hoarse cry from his comrade behind.

Could he hold them? Hit again and again, the blood streaming across his eyes, one arm powerless, he worked on by some incredible will power, and never could the enemy reach the gun.

Then a shout from behind. Supports at last! A last effort—just one more—one little one—supports, Jamie—hold them!

The gun lever moves again—so feebly. There is a sound in his ears of great waters rushing, and with it the faint echo of the Scot-

tish cry. With a little moan he drops forward over the breech as his comrades sweep across the bridge in irresistible charge.

They found him then, hand still gripped upon the lever, and in his body were thirty bullet-wounds. But Jamie had "held them."

Such were the men who fought at the Aisne.

# X

## ON BIG GUNS, SPIES AND OTHER MATTERS

CHORUS . . . *The nimble gunner*
*With linstock now the devilish cannon touches,*
*And down goes all before them. Still be kind,*
*And eke out our performance with your mind.*

IT was on Wednesday, the 16th, that the first shell from the new "devilish cannon" of the Germans sailed over and made a very horrid mess in the village of Missy, which it nearly destroyed. And an awe-inspiring monster it was; 262 pounds of it. Our heaviest gun in those days threw only a 60 lb. shell, our field-gun 18 lbs. So you will see at once what an enormous difference there was. Incidentally the estimated range of that new gun was well over 5 miles. Of course, that doesn't sound very far when you have just been talking about H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* smashing up a fort 20 miles away, but then you must remember that on land transport and platforms for big guns form a serious problem.

Yes, that first shell had a most bewildering effect. It landed well within the village, and the near-by houses collapsed as though an

earthquake had passed, while hardly a window in the place remained unbroken. After the first gasp of amazement the villagers fled panic-stricken. The few of our men who were there seemed too dazed to do anything. At first nobody had any idea what had happened, for the explosion was unlike anything they had yet experienced. Until they knew that it was a shell the general opinion was that a great pile of ammunition had been hit and exploded.

Unfortunately from then onwards the men were to endure the continuous nerve-racking ordeal of these monsters, and although they soon came to laugh at them, as they always do at danger or discomfort, nobody can say that they were popular. If the German gunner scored a direct hit—well, there was nothing left of the target. Otherwise the shell did curiously little damage save when it burst within a "dug-out" or on the top of a trench. In that case every soul inside would be buried alive—surely the most horrible of deaths.

I remember being deeply impressed one afternoon by some German gunnery near Bourg. There were a couple of small iron bridges over the canal about 60 yards or so apart. Suddenly, without any ranging shot, one of those great shells plumped right on the bridge and smashed it through.

"Hullo," I could hear that German gunner

remarking, "there's a bridge. Better have it down." Plump! The bridge was down.

"Hullo," said the German again, "why, there's another bridge! Better have that down too." A second shell. Plump! The second bridge was knocked through. No more. Just those two shells to do the job. It was quite uncanny.

But the successes of the German gunnery, and the accurate finding of targets were in the main due to their extraordinary Secret Intelligence Service. It will be remembered that we had instances of this the very first day at Mons. Now, when a German battery began scoring hits you didn't waste time exclaiming what remarkably fine shots the Germans were—you began to hunt for the spy.

There was one typical instance (of many) in Rheims. General D'Esperey, the G.O.C.-in-Chief the 5th French Army, took over a school-house for his Headquarters. Early the next morning something like 50 enemy guns were switched directly on to the house, and the general barely escaped with his life. Several of his Staff officers were killed.

At the Aisne German spies were a regular plague. On one single day sixteen were captured and shot. Of these one was taken with 50,000 francs on him, presumably blood money,

for he was discovered in the very act of telephoning military information to the enemy.

Even with the little that is actually known of the working of this phase of German activity one is amazed at the ingenuity and money expended—for the comparatively trifling results obtained. Some of the tricks and disguises of these agents read like pages from an Oppenheim romance.

One of our Corps H.Q. took up its abode in a certain village one afternoon. A Staff officer chanced to glance up at the hands of the church clock to learn the time. To his astonishment the hands of the clock began to run round and back again, jerking from one figure to another.

Guessing what was wrong he entered the church and climbed the belfry steps. In the tower he discovered the sexton engaged in the gentle art of semaphore signalling to an invisible enemy. Probably in a quarter of an hour Corps H.Q. would have found their house being made into a target for German guns.

A French battery was immediately shelled by the enemy whenever and wherever it came into position. For some days the affair remained a mystery until it was noticed that a shepherd with a flock of sheep invariably followed the battery when on the march. An enemy airman, taking the position of the battery

from the flock of sheep, could then signal back accurate information.

One of the cleverest cases of disguise I came across was in a little town where the mayor had just held up a fast motor-car containing two bedraggled and handcuffed refugees on the back seat crushed between a couple of gendarmes armed with rifles. The chauffeur was another gendarme.

"Ah, monsieur," said I, "I see you've got a couple of spies."

"A couple!" said he. "Take another look, monsieur. They are *all* spies."

And so they were, both refugees and gendarmes. Though how the mayor had spotted them I could not imagine. Naturally, any sentries would let such a car-load pass almost without question. But perhaps they tried it once too often.

It is sad to think that quite a number of the spies captured were French suborned by German money, but I am sure that the number of these was exaggerated. Men are apt to forget the peaceful penetration of the Germans and how they settle in the country for years, assimilating the language and manners, and so are easily mistaken for French.

Cases like that of a leading merchant of a certain town near-by were very common. For some fifteen years this merchant had had in his

service a confidential clerk who seemed invaluable to him and to the business, and who came to be treated almost as a son. A week before war broke out the clerk disappeared.

When a German Division entered the town the confidential clerk came back, but now as the officer in command of a company. He found his old quarters very comfortable, for he knew where everything was, and with a cellar of good wine he was able to entertain his friends quite pleasantly. The entertainment was made still more attractive by the enforced presence of the two daughters of the house. You will know what that means where the Huns are concerned.

Further, the erstwhile clerk, having had access to all the books of the firm, had acquired a great deal of information about the firm's customers, and that meant most of the principal people in the district. The information proved very useful in the robbery and extortion which followed.

These were some of the ways in which this typical example of German manhood was able to recompense his late employer and the family for fifteen years of trust and affection.

It is very irritating that the majority of our people at home should still refuse to credit the widespread activity of the German agent in foreign countries. When one takes the case of Italy, for instance, where the Germans had

succeeded in acquiring the control of the majority of the great banking-houses and had direct interest in many of the important commercial firms; of Russia, where nearly every war and political department was undermined by German interest; of Holland, with its German-owned banks and newspapers; of France, with its elaborate secret service—when all this is recalled how can our people continue fondly to delude themselves that England is free from the German blight? Great Britain, the arch-enemy! We talk glibly of what we shall do in case of invasion, of the defence by the Navy, of the immediate extermination of the raiding force. But with invasion the danger is from within our shores, not from without. And so it will be when we come to set our house in order after the war.

Spies appear to be a necessary evil in war. They have always existed and probably always will. Old Sun Tzŭ, the Chinese general, stoutly defends them in his famous treatise on the Art of War. And that was written 2,500 years ago.

But the enemy did not owe all their knowledge of our movements to spies. Many a German officer and man, in uniform, were discovered concealed in the middle of our lines at the end of a telephone wire which once or twice was found to be connected up with our own H.Q. lines. One officer was discovered cramped up

in a largish pigeon-cote, another in the middle of a haystack, and so on. That was real pluck on their part, for they must have believed that they would certainly be shot if captured. Needless to add, they were treated decently and merely sent back as prisoners. One does not care to imagine the fate of any of our own men taken in similar circumstances.

For many a weary month to come our men were compelled to face the terrible weight of enemy guns without the glint of satisfaction that it was being replied to. How the infantry faced the shelling was suggested to me by a German officer. "We pound your men all day and even then cannot get ours to attempt a charge on the bayonets."

I cannot remember when the new heavy guns of ours arrived from home, but I have a note under September 19 that they were expected at any moment. But even when they did arrive they were able to make very little difference except in the moral effect upon our own troops, for the Germans fired nearly twenty-five shells for each one that we could send back. On the same date I have noted that there had at last arrived the new 18-pr. field-guns which were sent to replace those lost in the Retreat. With them came a number of machine-guns.

One is anxious to record facts like these not only for present reading, but rather for the historian of the future. I have already emphasised the fact, and I would do so again and again, that no history of these early days can be a true one which does not take the fullest account of the conditions under which our men worked: of the human element, in short.

You will doubtless have read in histories already published that the infantry were now digging trenches and making "dug-outs." Quite true! But imagine how it was being done. The greater proportion of the spades and picks had been lost, as I have said, in the Retreat, and although new ones were being supplied as quickly as possible the work was just now only possible through purchasing tools in the neighbouring towns and villages. And towns do not keep much of a supply of such articles in stock.

Then there was the difficulty of the roads. The bad weather and the ceaseless heavy transport had reduced them to a shocking condition even in a single week. There were not very many French civilians available, but such as there were at once found employment in road-repairing. And a very slow job they made of it.

The one thing which never seemed to fail was the rations; and just about now the first

issue of rum was made. I wonder how many hundreds of lives, thousands possibly, that evening tot of rum saved during the winter. Good hefty stuff it was, too; the real Navy brand. At first it came up in great casks, and there was a lot of waste in dealing it out, while some of the men secured much more than was good for them. But proper arrangements were soon made and all went well.

Extra clothing, waterproof sheets, etc., were now being sent up as fast as they could be procured, and these things made life just about bearable. But no necessaries like these (we had not yet arrived at the luxury stage) could relieve the supreme discomfort of this curious cave-dwelling, chalk-quarry life with its incessant wet, exposure and consequent dysentery, and the never-ending stream of shells and bullets. Worst of all was the knowledge which was now spreading that we could advance no farther and could not adequately reply to the enemy guns. The move to Flanders, when it came, was hailed with delight by everyone. But after a few weeks' experience of winter in Flanders the Force looked back with longing to those days at the Aisne.

But about the supplies, the marvel is that the Force was so wonderfully well served as it was. I do not think I ever once heard a man grumble except in the usual, general sort of

way. And even then it was not really grumbling, but rather his way of expressing a wistful longing to have the war over and be at home again. How the demands for the Force were being met at home one cannot tell; there was probably much confusion before the machinery of supply was got into working order. But in France only those actually concerned with the Quarter-Master-General's department could speak justly of the magnificent effort which met and overcame endless difficulties.

As the crow flies the Force was well over 300 miles away from its main base. All supplies had to come up over the network of French railways, a feat which, even in peace time, would have involved no mean effort of organisation. But in war, over a strange railway system, with the greater part of the rolling-stock needed by our Allies, and what was left being manned by a much depleted staff—that indeed was an achievement in organisation to be proud of. If the country only realised half the debt which is owed to General Sir William Robertson for his magnificent work during the first months of the war they would honour him even more than they do to-day.

And the railway difficulties suggest but one phase of the organisation. There was, for instance, the motor-transport problem. Motor-lorries built to carry Mayflower's Margarine,

Pulltite's Corsets and other delightful products over honest English roads in the piping times of peace could hardly be expected to stand for long the strain of war over French pavé roads. And when there are a dozen different types of vehicles for which to provide spare parts, etc., and when spare parts are not to be obtained because they come from Belgium or America or elsewhere, then there are more difficulties. And these, too, are somehow surmounted.

Then I think that we hardly appreciate as we should the exquisite tact and comradeship of our French Allies in those days in this matter of railways and supplies. Tact is not a quality in which, as a rule, an Englishman shines, especially out of his own country, so there were naturally endless possibilities of friction. But the French were always so anxious to meet us in every possible way that they refused to take offence, even when they must have thought English manners and speech very brusque and curt. And as it takes two to make a quarrel——

And this reminds me of a very interesting and significant change which we noticed about this time in the bearing of the French towards the British. A single illustration will suggest its character.

One day just after the first bombardment of Rheims an officer had to go into that city on

duty. The chauffeur was the only other occupant of the car. About a mile or so outside the city they found encamped in the fields the outposts of the population, mostly women and children, who had fled from the German shells. From there right into the town the road was lined on both sides with people standing or sitting two and three deep all dressed in deep mourning. The sight, he said, reminded him of the London crowd at Queen Victoria's funeral.

But on the approach of the car they all started to their feet, and instead of waving and cheering, as the French had always greeted English troops, they all clapped with their hands, as though applauding a favourite actor.

For a few moments the officer was too bewildered to respond to the ovation. Then he began to salute in return, but the farther he went the louder became the clapping. So in desperation he felt compelled to keep on raising his cap. And, as he said afterwards, he realised for the first time what an ordeal it must be for the King to drive through London, and how it was His Majesty wore out so many hats.

Wednesday, the 16th, was a red letter day for my own unit, for it was then that we received our first mail since leaving home, just a month before. A month! It seemed like six months. With the mail were newspapers up

to August 30, a week before, and we were able to get a glimpse of the great happenings outside our own little corner. We were tremendously excited to hear all about the Retreat and what we had done and why; and oh! so disappointed to find that the Russians had not yet got to Berlin. Nor was there any news about a big fight in the North Sea, and that we couldn't understand. We learned that recruiting was going ahead at a tremendous pace mainly because of the great disaster (how we rubbed our eyes in astonishment!) of the Mons affair: also that there was much distress in Hamburg and other German cities through shortage of food. Oh yes, we should certainly be home for Christmas.

For one or two there were parcels of "woollies." But how clever and thoughtful of the folk at home to think of such things! Socks and lovely soft scarves—however did they guess? One man actually received some bootlaces, to his vast delight and the envy of his fellows.

But the climax came two days or so later. The Quarter-Master-Sergeant appeared in the lines and announced that some tobacco and cigarettes had arrived for us, a present from the *Daily Sketch*—I think that was the paper. Officers and men thought he was joking. Tobacco sent by the *Daily Sketch!* Why in

the name of wonder should strangers send us a present?

Yet it was true. For each and every one there was a little tin of tobacco, two packets of cigarettes and two boxes of matches, "with compliments and good wishes." If only the donors could have seen the surprise, stupefaction almost, and the gratitude with which that present was received, how happy they would have been. We received many such parcels during the days to come, but the pleasure they gave was never dulled by repetition, and we never ceased to wonder at and appreciate warmly the generosity and kindly thought of good friends at home.

About that time we heard, again with no little astonishment, that both officers and men were to receive a regular Government allowance of tobacco. There is no need at this stage to speak of the importance of tobacco to our fighting men. It is perhaps a libel on their powers of endurance to say that they could not get on without it, but the ration and supplies from home certainly make the whole world of difference.

Everyone smokes all day long, from the officers at G.H.Q. right down through the ranks. At first it was a pipe, although Thomas Atkins never has cared about pipe-smoking. But as the days wore on and the stress continued we

all drifted almost unconsciously to the cigarette. A matter of nerves, the doctors will tell you, and I suppose that is what it was. It was no use trying to induce the men to stick to a pipe as being better for them. No, it must be cigarettes. Given a cigarette our lads will bear the most horrible wound torture with fortitude, and it is the first thing they ask for on recovering consciousness.

So accustomed are we now to the perfect organisation of the Red Cross work, and the speedy removal of the wounded from the firing-line, that many will doubtless be surprised to learn that the Force had no motor ambulances available until about the third week in September. One need hardly remark how urgent was the need for this transport and how difficult it was to deal properly with the more serious cases. The wounded were got back as far as Braisne, a few miles south of the Aisne, and thence by rail. But it was a dreadful ordeal for the sufferers under the somewhat primitive arrangements which were the best available.

Some day it is to be hoped that there will be published a full appreciation of the magnificent work performed by the doctors and R.A.M.C. staff, especially during the first eight months. Everyone knows that our R.A.M.C. ranks second to none in the medical services of the

nations,[1] but never have its unfailing skill and self-sacrificing devotion been more finely exhibited than under the ghastly conditions of this modern warfare.

We marvel, or should do if we were not so well accustomed to it, at the surgical skill displayed in modern hospitals under ideal conditions of working. Conceive, if you can, the work of the regimental doctors in the advanced firing-line trenches where they endure the same hail of shrapnel and bullets as their fighting comrades. There they wait, with their stretcher-bearers, ready at any moment to "go over the top" to tend and bring in the men who fall in the charge.

Imagine, too, the Advanced Dressing Station, which is nearly always within the fire zone, the remains of a cottage perhaps, or maybe a "dug out." Here the sufferers are tended rather more carefully than was possible in the actual firing-line: wounds are washed, given antiseptic treatment, and bandaged thoroughly before the patients are sent forward on the next stage. A sight, this, once experienced never to be forgotten. The rows of wounded men, the gasping moans, or heavy, stertorous breath-

[1] Due in largest measure to the wonderful foresight and untiring labour of Sir Alfred Keogh, Director-General of the A.M.S. Never may his name be forgotten, for he is one of the greatest of Englishmen.

ing of drugged sleepers, with the doctors and orderlies moving swiftly from stretcher to stretcher, while overhead shells burst and bullets hum. It matters nothing to the staff that at any moment the Red Cross flag may attract the enemy's special attention, and a couple of well-placed shells end it for all, doctors and patients alike. The work goes on with never a break, day or night, the staff snatching food and sleep when and where they can.

Yes, I hope that book will soon be written; and written not by any member of the Corps, but by someone of sympathy outside who will pay the fullest possible tribute to this noblest of all professions.

# XI

## STILL AT THE AISNE

K. Hen. *For never two such kingdoms did contend*
*Without much fall of blood; whose guiltless drops*
*Are every one a woe, a sore complaint,*
*'Gainst him whose wrongs give edge unto the swords*
*That make such waste in brief mortality.*

With the close, on September 18, of that stern four days' battle for the heights commanding the Aisne we get the first hint of the change which was to come in the general character of the fighting. Two points should be noted, the one being a result of the other. Let me first recall to mind the position of the opposing lines.

You will remember that at Mons and through the Retreat the British Force held the post of honour on the extreme left of the Franco-British line. When the Allies turned at the Marne a new French Army was formed to the west of the Force, so that when we advanced to the Aisne we had about 200 odd miles of French troops on our right and about 50 miles of French on our left. This French line on our left followed the course of the Aisne to

north of Compiègne and then made a sharp bend, almost a right angle, to the north on the road to Noyon. A glance at the picture map facing p. 1 will show the position.

Now, the first point was this. On September 18 General Joffre informed Sir John French that in order to put an end to this hold-up of the Allied advance he proposed to extend the French line on the left so as to try to get round the German right. It was the same strategy which he had attempted at the Marne battle.

The second point followed. To quote Sir John French: "It was now evident to me that the battle in which we had been engaged since the 12th inst. must last some days longer, until the effect of this new flank movement could be felt and a way opened to drive the enemy from his positions." This meant that the British had to dig themselves in as strongly as possible and then hold on for all they were worth until the order came from the French Commander-in-Chief for a big attack. It also meant that we should have to start a proper system of reliefs for the men in the trenches, just as though they were on sentry duty. In this way, then, was begun that trench warfare which soon was to become so painfully familiar to our men and our people at home.

Right along the top of the northern ridge, and in German hands, there ran the famous

highway known as the Ladies' Road. This has so often been described that there is no need to say more about it here. From the moment the British had crossed the Aisne this road was their objective. To win it meant that you commanded not only the river valley, but also the country to the north of the road. It was therefore a very important position, and the Force had confidently started in to capture it.

Mercifully the future was hidden from them. For three weary years, short of four months, did the Allies strive to take and hold that ridge. It was not until the first week in May, 1917, that the French, backed by overwhelming artillery, at last brilliantly carried it by assault.

The infantry, then, settled down to this most uncomfortable mode of fighting, and, as is the way with our Army long since accustomed to campaigns under all conditions in every corner of the world, they very quickly adapted themselves to it. Some of the difficulties I have already suggested, and indeed when one recalls the lack of tools and necessary materials, and compares the later conditions in Flanders when trench warfare developed into a fine art, it seems astonishing how splendidly the men managed.

Barbed wire, for instance, which is of the first importance, was only to be obtained in small quantities. So neighbouring spinneys

and farm lands were raided for wire rabbit netting and ordinary fence wire. It wasn't very much good, but it was better than nothing, and you did occasionally succeed in tying up the wily German into knots when he became too venturesome.

There were two special forms of discomfort which helped to make this trench life so trying. During the first fortnight or so it rained hard nearly every day, and as the men actually lived in chalk the state of their daily existence is more easily imagined than described. The trenches higher up the hill did get a certain amount of drainage, so it was only very wet chalk. Lower down the water stayed there, and you sat about or stood all day long in a kind of thick milky mixture. Good honest mud can be eaten with a rasher of bacon or added to a billy of tea, and you do not bother about it overmuch. But chalk is another matter. Chalk sticks and tastes gritty, and you cannot get rid of it. Then with the fine weather came the chalk dust, and that filled your eyes and ears and nose and lungs. Really there was little to choose between wet or dry.

The other discomfort was another new feature, at least in this form, and a horrible one it was. In many places our trenches were only 80 or 100 yards distant from those of the enemy, and—well, what happens to the men who fall,

dead or wounded, in those great massed attacks of the Germans? It is one of those things which never seems to occur to the man in the street who supposes, if he ever thinks about it at all, that they "get buried somewhere." Nor can he realise the appalling slaughter when rank upon rank of closely packed men advance against modern quick-firing guns or British musketry. To read that 400 enemy dead was the result of an attack against one small section of trench means to him very little when his brain is overwhelmed by the enormous figures in which we count to-day.

Stand in a corner of one of the front line trenches for five minutes when a German attack develops, an attack in six closely packed ranks with reserves following. The first two ranks appear 200 yards away, and upon the instant every machine-gun and rifle opposite to them opens fire at top speed and with perfect accuracy. Before 20 yards have been covered more than half of the men in those two ranks are down. The gaps fill as more and more blue-grey figures crowd up. Now they are beginning to step over the bodies of their fallen comrades. The slaughter continues; with every ten yards covered it becomes more and more deadly. Great lanes are rent through the advancing mass, and now those behind have actually to clamber over their dead. Still they press on, but

more slowly. The dead are heaped higher and higher, for those who climb are shot down and fall upon this writhing parapet. Thus the trench is reached, but the defenders can see nothing of the ground in front, for before the trench lies a new rampart—of dead; a rampart perhaps five feet high. Then follows the steel.

There the dead remain. And slowly the air becomes tainted with the heavy, musty smell of decay; the acid, fetid odour of rain-sodden bodies, blotched, bloated and hideous. It soaks in through every pore of the living men in the trench and saturates their very thoughts waking and sleeping with the loathing of it. And ever above the dead and dying hover the ghoulish carrion birds.

In due course, after several days, the enemy may find opportunity to remove the dead for cremation in the great kilns they are constructing, or to cart them back to the Corpse Factories which energetic commercial companies soon had in working order.[1] Let nothing be wasted of this "cannon fodder," which William Hohenzollern has so thoughtfully provided.

That is modern war. And it is well for the people to visualise it that they may swear a mighty oath to so work and work that never

[1] It is understood that these factories were in operation quite two years before their existence was discovered by an omniscient section of the English Press. But, indeed, there is nothing very novel about the system—or, rather, the German application of it.

again shall the world know such a nightmare of horror.

But our share in the battle of the Aisne spreads over a wide expanse of ground. It was only up in the trenches on the hill-side that this cloud of death hung so heavily. Nor indeed did death always reign there. For one afternoon, when there was a lull in the firing from both sides, I saw two sleek brown cows wander slowly across the bullet-marked ground until they came to a trench and there gaze placidly down upon the strange earth-dwellers. It was a curious sight in the midst of all that carnage, and the men were perhaps even more surprised than the cows.

Here is a homing aeroplane. Let us take the observer's seat as the pilot wings slowly back to the aeropark on this warm, sunny afternoon of a St. Martin's summer and catch a glimpse of the rest of the battlefield.

The machine rises, and immediately beneath there spread out the thickly wooded lower slopes of the Aisne ridges. A little to the left (we are heading southwards) a glimpse of water suggests the canal, and hard by you will see the roofs of houses. That is the village of Bourg, where the 1st and 2nd Divisions have their H.Q. There is a warm welcome for a guest if you look in at the Officers' Mess, and

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mail day is quite a good time to select, for the chances are that a hamper of succulent dainties has just arrived from Fortnum & Mason's. Of course, a "Jack Johnson" may select that very moment to drop in too, but such little contretemps will only add zest to the meal.

Now we are climbing higher. Take a glance behind and you will catch the white gleam of the chalk where the trenches and quarries scar the hill-side. Immediately beneath unwinds the ribbon of the Aisne, and far to the left you may trace the silver thread until in the hazy distance the twin towers of Rheims Cathedral stand out darkly against the mist of the encircling hills. To your right little villages nestle cosily all along the valley, half hidden amongst trees, but you will be able to pick them out by the positions of the river crossings, the pontoon bridges, or the wreckage of the old solid structures. There in the distance is Venizel, with its double bridge, pontoon and road; it marks the extreme west of the British position.

If a brief digression be permitted, it was Venizel which inspired the first of the poems written on active service in this war by a soldier. You will find it published in the *Times* one day of October, 1914. It was the first of that great stream of poetry from our fighting men which has so astonished the world by its

nobility of thought and utterance, and which, in creating anew for us this dear England of ours, has sent men to their death for Her with a happy smile upon their lips, and has, too, been an abiding comfort to their loved ones left bereaved.

> And she is very small and very green,
> And full of little lanes all dense with flowers,
> That wind along and lose themselves between
> Mossed farms, and parks, and fields of quiet sheep.
> And in the hamlets, where her stalwarts sleep,
> Low bells chime out from old elm-hidden towers.[1]

In nearly every one of the villages on the southern bank a Division or a Brigade has its H.Q. All are well within the fire zone and liable to be shelled at any moment if the enemy know them to be there. If you approach the house in a car you are requested to pull up some distance from the entrance, so that the position may not be marked down by a possible enemy airman. Otherwise, beyond a small flag by the door and the coming and going of a few officers and orderlies, there is nothing to show.

And indeed as you look down from your seat there is nothing to suggest that you are flying over a battlefield unless it is the puffs of smoke

[1] From "England," by Geoffrey Howard, Lieutenant, Royal Fusiliers.

from bursting shells and the blurred reports from the guns. Of the infantry there is never a sign, and search as you may you will hardly find one of our batteries. Battery commanders have learned a good many things in the last month, and the art of concealment is one of them.

Do you see those great fountains of earth being thrown up in that large open field down there? Those are shells from an enemy battery. They imagine that they are shelling one of our batteries, whereas the only living things in sight anywhere near are three women quietly working in the next field. We did have a howitzer battery near by two days ago, but as soon as the German airman had spotted the position the battery commander took his guns away. You will now find them 600 yards off on the far side of that wood. In the meanwhile the enemy shells come plumping methodically down eighteen a minute, at the same precise intervals of time and distance. The little piece of amusement has already cost them about £25,000 at a modest reckoning, and the net result is a strip of field rather badly cut up.

We are now flying low over a broad tract of flat countryside chequered with fields under steady cultivation and crossed here and there by yellow, dusty roads. Now and again you will catch a glimpse of a swift staff car or half a dozen motor ambulances, and you are disap-

pointed, for there is no other sign of movement. But away to the east and west there are woods and tree-shaded roads. Peer through the leaves and you will see columns of transport, battalions on the march, batteries halted by the road-side awaiting orders, cavalry horses picketed out enjoying a few hours' grazing.

In the fields around the peasants go on with their work and children play the old, old games as unconcernedly as though there was never a soldier or gun within a hundred miles. And yet the shells come over in a never-ending stream. From here to Rheims and beyond are wide vineyards, and the harvest must be gathered that the good wine of France may not fail. There are fields which must be tilled that the earth may still bring forth her increase. But your French peasant and madame his wife are fatalists both, as are most of their countrymen and women, and so the work goes forward.

"But yes, monsieur," he will tell you, "it is indeed sad that men should so kill each other. For me, I remember the terrible 1870 and the accursed Boche of those days. He is no different, and I fought. But now I am too old, though I would gladly fire a gun for la Patrie. Eh bien, qu'est ce que vous voulez que je fais, moi? Le bon Dieu He gives to us the good earth. Shall we not thank Him for the gift

by using it? It matters not that we die to-day or to-morrow. That does not concern us."

And so flying over this curiously deserted countryside which yet teems with life and movement, we are nearing the little market-town of Fère-en-Tardenois. Here is G.H.Q. whence a hundred threads of communication radiate to keep the Commander-in-Chief and his departments in touch with every part of the Force. And here, too, is railhead, the aeropark, and the end of our flight.

They say that if a man stands for long enough on the corner of Piccadilly Circus he will, sooner or later, meet all his acquaintances. The same remark might well apply to G.H.Q.; not, perhaps, so much in Aisne days, as later in Flanders, when there was a continual procession of somebodies and nobodies to worry a long-suffering Staff.

But even now at Fère you would constantly meet well-known faces from the London world, and wonder mightily what business took them there. War was then a stern business, and the latter-day self-conducted tours of "the front" had not then been inaugurated. So one day you would see the then First Lord of the Admiralty, a well-known K.C., a late War Minister, a famous Nonconformist minister, a prelate of the Roman Catholic Church, a minor Royalty or two, and many another. Anyhow,

they did not return home and write books upon the War "as I saw it," so all was well.

Apart from little incursions like these, G.H.Q. seemed to the officer visiting on duty to embrace a very happy little family, where everyone was on the best of terms with everyone else and all pulled together with fine efficiency. Nowadays G.H.Q. seems to share the duties of a huge Government department with the business side of a universal provider like Whiteley's, and the old bonhomie and intimacy have gone for ever.

With half an hour off duty from G.H.Q. for an evening walk officers would stroll up to the flying-ground to see the aeroplanes come home and glean some news from "the front." Flying men have an extraordinary sixth sense which enables them to tell positively whose machine it is when the aeroplane is no more than a speck in the far distance. So, at the sunset hour, little groups gather on the flying-ground to watch anxiously for their comrades' return, telling over the aeroplanes as they appear.

Here there is no panoply of war, no hint of the grim slaughter which is being carried on a few miles northward; only a sheer ecstasy and pride in the grace and purity of this new creation of man's. The flight of a single aeroplane still has the magic to bring us all out

with mouths agape to gaze at the wonder of it; but in the flight of a squadron there is something akin to the incomparable majesty of battle-cruisers steaming swiftly into line ahead; and the world can offer no more inspiring sight.

As the sun dips swiftly down, great beams of ruddy gold shoot forth and spread like the shafts of a fan across the faintest green of the west. At the high summit a belt of lightest, feathery cloud seems to hold and imprison the flood of light, and there burns and glows with the shimmering iridescence of mother-of-pearl.

But there is little thought just now for the glories of a sunset, and all eyes are strained to the north for the first sign of the returning airmen after a somewhat perilous day.

A sudden exclamation from a young Flight Lieutenant, and quickly he takes his field-glasses.

"It's Murdoch," he says with decision.

And now, if you have had an air or sea training, you may just distinguish, far away, against the dove-grey breast of the sky, a little moving speck. Indeed, it might be a mote dancing down a sunbeam; and yet this officer has seen it for a biplane and named the pilot.

A second speck hastens after the first. "There's Jimmie!" says someone else; "the old 'bus is doing fine." A third, a fourth, a fifth, and each is named down at the first moment and with more than a hint of relief.

Now the vanguard is well in sight, and still the specks climb from out the grey north into the palest blue of the heaven. Nearer still, and your landsman's ears have at last caught the whir of the propellers, and with the sound you at last see them as a flock of homing wild swans flying orderly in wedge fashion behind their leader. The last rays of the dying sun strike athwart the planes and tint them redly as the pilots "bank" slightly.

The position of the aeropark is an excellent one, wide and spacious; no need to manœuvre carefully for a landing. Above, the air is brilliant with sound; seventeen aeroplanes have been counted, and comments run from mouth to mouth as the men below swiftly detect any mishaps. But there is an eighteenth yet to come, and no sign of her, near or far.

"Looks as though old Fleabag has been done in," says our Flight Lieutenant slowly. (P.S.—Fletcher-Bannister is rather too much of a mouthful to pronounce when you're in a hurry, and what more appropriate pet name could be found when a fond aunt has just sent him a most lordly, warm and woolly sleeping-valise for the cold nights? Incidentally, it is only very popular, or very obnoxious, officers who have pet-names, and as the R.F.C. doesn't carry any of the latter class we may presume that "Fleabag" was one of the former.)

By now the leading pilots have decided exactly where they will land. In ones and twos they spiral down and level; then, softly, their aeroplanes settle to earth and so lightly taxi forward to the expectant groups of officers and mechanics.

"Hullo, old son, any luck?—We've got a tophole pigeon-pie for dinner.—How's brother Boche to-day?—Did your tank leak after all?—You'll want a bit of patching up, young feller-my-lad." These, and half a hundred similar remarks. But most insistent of all, "Where's old Fleabag? They've not downed him, have they?"

"Don't know what happened to him," comes a reply. "Engine trouble, I think, and he had to go down. We were somewhere near Laon and brother Boche was potting away like the very devil."

So the groups break up for tea and cigarettes. But the Flight Lieutenant remains behind, still searching the gathering dusk with his glasses, and the Flight Commander joins him. There is always hope, and Fleabag is an exceptionally good man, though inclined for too many risks. Yet, after all, that is a flying man's job.

"He oughtn't to have taken that new machine without a good run through first," observes the Commander; "he was asking for

trouble. But we'll have the lights on," he adds, turning to give the necessary orders.

The darkness creeps on apace, and with the shadows a little puff of wind from the south-east suggests that a breeze is freshening up. Those prevailing winds from our rear have been a constant trouble to our airmen all through. In the far corner of the ground a searchlight fizzes angrily for a few moments before it decides to burn properly, and almost at the same instant the Flight Lieutenant detects a faint star of light in the northern sky.

His whoop of delight brings a rush of feet from near-by tents, and the men crowd out to see. "It's old Fleabag, you chaps," he cries, dancing round; "he's signalling for lights." And two or three race hard for the searchlights which are there to illuminate the landing-ground.

Now the sound of propellers is distantly heard, to be drowned for a moment by the mighty cheer which goes up. "Good old Fleabag!—By gum, he's done 'em after all!—Cheer-oh, Fleabag! Are we downhearted?"—with the inevitable long-drawn response.

And Fleabag, just to show that he's glad to be home again, and that it's a jolly sort of little old world after all, and that there are a lot of jolly decent sort of chaps in it, and that brother Boche is really a harmless sort of blighter who can't help

it, and that, with luck, there'll be a letter from HER waiting for him, and that, again with luck, there'll be some pigeon-pie left if he hurries—in short, just to show that he's glad to be alive, he does a couple of fine looping stunts, slips down a giddy spiral, and makes a perfect landing without turning a hair.

And there we'll leave him, for it isn't the slightest good asking him about his enforced landing in the enemy lines, nor how he jumped his machine over the edge of a quarry to escape, nor any little details of that sort. But tomorrow morning at daybreak there will be an admirably drawn report lying on the Commander-in-Chief's desk. And a little later in the day, should you chance to be there, you may see old Fleabag, shivering in every limb, standing before the Field-Marshal, explaining a few more points and receiving in return just the kindly nod and the two words of appreciation which are worth infinitely more than all the M.C.'s and D.S.O.'s.

Yes, there's a good deal of the silent Senior Service about the R.F.C., and that alone is a good enough passport to the affections of the warm-hearted British public.

# XII

## THE MOVE TO FLANDERS

K. HEN. *Mark then abounding valour in our English,*
*That, being dead, like to the bullet's grazing,*
*Breaks out into a second course of mischief,*
*Killing in relapse of mortality.*

THE Battery was having an afternoon's stand easy, and Stanion, the Senior Subaltern, thought it a good opportunity to pay a visit to the section on detached duty and see how they were getting on under the command of our old friend Sergeant Smart. The two guns were in action, artfully concealed from aircraft about fifty yards beyond a ruined farm.

"Well, Sergeant Smart, going on all right?"

Sergeant Smart scrambled to his feet, saluted, and thought that they had nothing to complain about.

"How about getting home by Christmas," asked Stanion; "do you still think we shall do it?"

"Well, sir," said Smart, "I don't see how we can be stuck here much longer like this. 'Tisn't in human nature. And those Russians,

they ought to be in Belgium by now. Shouldn't be surprised if we didn't get them on the run again any time now."

"Back over the Rhine, you think?" asked Stanion with the suspicion of a twinkle.

"Oh, yes, sir, we shan't stop this time. And then, I suppose, we shall go and give them 'Ome Rule same as we did the Boers. We're a funny lot," Smart added meditatively.

Stanion burst out laughing. "Well, Sergeant, you're not altogether wrong. I believe we're going to move—no, I don't know when, but we've just had a hint to be ready at a moment's notice."

"A proper move, sir? Pity if it wasn't, because we've made it very comfortable here, sir."

"Yes, a proper move this time," said Stanion. "Don't harness up, but see you're quite ready. By the way, heard the Crown Prince's latest?"

"Is that the man who stole the——"

"Yes," interrupted Stanion hastily. "He was holding forth to some of his friends. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'it is all a lie that you read in the French and English papers about the English Army still fighting. The English Army no longer exists. I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that we have captured or destroyed it altogether.' Quaint sort of chap,

isn't he? I wonder if he really believes it. Well, I'll just go round the horses."

This particular "latest" was actually well authenticated, and the statement was made in all sincerity, if not by that remarkable individual certainly by one of his personal staff. Shakespeare's *Henry V.* supplies us with the usual apt commentary.

Already, by the last week in September, preparations were well forward for inaugurating the "second course of mischief," although scarcely so much as a hint of its nature was allowed to leak out. When everything was ready definite orders were issued for immediate action, and even then Commanding Officers were as much in the dark as they had been when leaving England six weeks before. It chanced that a week or so earlier a paper of "Instructions for Billeting Troops in Belgium" had been circulated. But this had been taken to mean that a straightforward advance was imminent; no one anticipated what actually happened.

There were several good reasons why the British Force should be moved if possible. One was that such excellent material would be more valuable in the difficult open fighting to the north than shut up in trenches which could be held by less experienced troops. A second, that

by moving nearer to the coast we should have our sea bases more handy and so lighten the serious problem of transport. We should also come back to our old position on the left flank of the Allied line.

But perhaps the most serious consideration was the strong menace which the Germans were directing against Antwerp, the last remaining stronghold of the Belgians. Whether the Higher Command realised that the fall of the city could only be a question of a few days one cannot at present say, but it must have been recognised that the situation was very grave. If Antwerp fell it would mean the release of at least 300,000 fresh German troops to sweep down past Ghent and Ypres.

During the last half of September General Joffre had been carrying on his strategy of attempting to outflank the German right. More and more French armies had been pushed up until, by September 30, the French line extended northwards from Compiègne right up to Arras. (It is worth glancing at the picture-map to get the general idea.) You must imagine that line as a stream of water flowing along fast against the side of a steep bank. At some point that bank will surely come to an end, when the stream will curl round the corner and dash in.

But the stream flowed ever on and on, dash-

ing against the bank, and nowhere was that gap reached. In fact, to abandon the metaphor, the French, instead of finding any weakening in the German line, were met by an ever-increasing resistance as they pushed northwards. And when it was found that the country was swarming with German cavalry it became evident that the enemy, too, had some big scheme in hand, and certainly had no intention of being taken unawares by an outflanking movement.

The German scheme was, in short, to seize the coast and ports of the Channel. "To Calais!" was now the cry of every good German, just as he had lately shrieked "To Paris!" and you will remember how they boasted of mounting great guns on the coast in order to bombard Dover.

Such, then, was the general idea at the end of September, and it will be seen at once that there was to be a race, the enemy trying to reach the seacoast, the Allies trying to prevent them —though how stern the race would be no one then guessed.

There have been so many astonishing feats performed during this war that one has come to live in a language of superlatives. Taking it all round I suppose that the evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula was as remarkable as any, this and the incredible feats of arms in the Battle

of the Landing on the Peninsula. But ruling out the Dardanelles Expedition, the three most striking achievements on the British side seem to me to have been the Battle of Le Cateau, the First Battle of Ypres (as it is called) which resulted in the saving of the Channel ports, and the evacuation of the Aisne position. Of course, in this last it was share and share alike between our good French Allies and ourselves, or it could not have been accomplished as it was.

And the remarkable thing about the move from the Aisne is that there is nothing to say about it. The organisation was so perfect that when the moment arrived there was never a hitch in the working. Thus people pass the achievement by with a little nod of appreciation, regarding it as all in the day's work. Yet consider for a moment what was done.

The British were holding a difficult front of twenty-six miles in length. Along this front, or in reserve immediately behind, we had approximately 70 battalions of Infantry, 15 regiments of Cavalry, and 84 batteries of Artillery, Horse, Field and Heavy. At least, that was about the strength on paper.

The German lines were, in many places, no more than 100 or 200 yards distant from the British trenches. In addition, the enemy dominated the situation with their big guns; but, despite the heaviest attacks, their infantry

had nowhere been able to break through the British line.

The problem before the French and British commanders was to withdraw all the British troops and put French in their places without letting the enemy know.

At the Aisne, owing to the position of our lines, it was never a very easy task to take a company or battalion out of the firing-line for a few days' rest and replace it by a new one. When it is a matter of changing, say, a brigade, the staff work has to be most carefully thought out in every detail. It is as though you are placed in charge of a signal-box at a big railway junction and have to work the points and signals without the help of the interlocking system.

If you can imagine something of the difficulties where our own troops alone are concerned, you will guess how complicated the business becomes when the troops of another nation come into the picture. The orders must be so carefully worded that there may be no possibility of mistake or misunderstanding when translated; the time-tables must be most precise; the officers and guides must know every yard of the ground blindfold, because the changes have to be made at night, with no lights, and in complete silence —these and a score of other details for the infantry.

With the artillery there is the handing over

of the gun positions, the interchange of maps and sketches showing ranges to various targets —all complicated by translation from English to French. Then there are the changes at all the H.Q.'s, the rearrangement of communications, telephones, etc. The detail of it all is endless. And it must all be done in secret.

I do not say that the move was so successfully carried out that the enemy had no inkling of what was going on. That was probably quite impossible in view of their elaborate system of secret agents. But at least the Germans made no sign during those few hazardous days, and the British were got away and the French moved in without any complications.

It was on Saturday, October 3, that a start was made with the first units to be moved. Some of the cavalry and the rearmost columns of motor transport were the first to go. Everything combined to send the men off in the highest spirits. It was lovely autumnal weather —days of bright, warm sunshine, nights of soft, radiant moonlight. Everyone was thoroughly tired of the inaction of trench life, and now they were off again, once more into the unknown, with a prospect of real movement. No one knew for certain our destination save, vaguely, that it was Belgium. But Belgium was flat, and that meant congenial

work for cavalry and guns. Oh, yes, all would go well now, and we should soon get round the German flank once we had brother Boche in the open. Then, Hey for England, Home and Beauty!

It took just about a week for a unit to complete the move. The Second Army Corps, for instance, was clear of its positions by October 5, and reached its new line in Flanders on the 11th. For most of the officers and men it was a week of picnic holiday despite the long marches. Certainly trains and roads and villages were rather too crowded for perfect comfort, but no one bothered much about that. Then it was rather jolly marching by moonlight. Nearly all the movements were made by night to escape air observers. And it was rather amusing having all the guns and vehicles covered with foliage and branches of trees. If a battery or column was doing a spell of daylight flitting and an enemy airman came over, you just halted and pretended to be a little wood. And the airman would fly home and tell how he had discovered a copse of trees which was not marked on his map, and please see that it's included in future editions—at least, that is what we hoped he would do.

It was rather like the fairies in Kensington Gardens who are in the middle of a delightful game when, suddenly, a grown-up mortal comes

along. All the fairies have to do is to stand perfectly still and pretend to be flowers, when the poor ignorant mortal will just exclaim, "What a lovely bed of daffodils!" and go blindly on his way.

Then, odd as it may seem, a great many of our men saw French troops for the first time. There were the typical French poilus, so well known from sketches and photographs. And everyone was struck by their astonishing marching powers. Here is an infantry regiment rambling along all across the road; no idea of marching in fours; no thought of keeping in step, and yet "getting there" with the best. And the men! Whether the type has altered I do not know; but I seem to see them now on the march, with their refined faces and beards which have never known a razor, looking (save for uniform and kit) as though they had stepped out from the canvas of some dim cathedral altar-piece of "The Last Supper."

Then there were the cavalry in their blue and red uniforms, with the baggy trousers and riding-boot continuations and the long plumes from their helmets. You have seen them so often in the first act of *Carmen*. Sometimes they would be wearing steel breast-plates and back-pieces, just as Meissonier painted them; and always the same wiry little horses of the

obvious Arab strain which will carry their riders to the very last gasp.

Our men of the mounted regiments were quick to notice and criticise points about the horses of our Allies. Certainly with the draught horses of the guns and transport, the difference between English and French methods in the care of their animals was very marked. But then, we are a nation of horse-lovers, and therein lies the secret. When a battery has half an hour's halt, and there is a patch of grass handy, you may be certain that our drivers will take the bits out and let the horses get their heads down for a few mouthfuls. Nor will you see a mounted man trot along the hard road if there is the choice of a stretch of turf alongside. Trifles? Yes; but it is the never-failing attention to such trifles which has helped to make our Army draught horses the peerless animals they are. It is good to observe that this war has taught us to bestow similar care and attention upon the men.

Then one noticed the difference in equipment—belts, harness and so forth. Just as our equipment (like the commissariat) always astonished and delighted the French, so our men could never understand how the French harness and leather-work held together. "*Mais si pratique,*" your poilu would say, fingering an officer's Sam Browne belt. No, the French do

not (or they did not) go in for practical articles, the ordinary, everyday necessaries as we understand them. I remember trying to buy a little air-pillow in cities like Rouen, Havre, and elsewhere. It was unobtainable. "Oh, yes," I was always told, "you have such practical articles in England; but in France—no."

But if we were ahead of the French in draught horses and equipment, our Allies had their revenge with their field-guns and the world-famous "Soixante-Quinze."

So much has been written about this remarkable weapon that there is really nothing very much left to tell. The most striking characteristic about it is, I think, the perfect simplicity of the mechanism. It is so simple that the Germans have never been able to discover the secret. For the legend goes that if the gun be taken to pieces the secret vanishes into thin air. To place a "·75" side by side with one of our eighteen-pounder field-guns is like comparing the simple engines of a penny steamboat with the intricate mechanism on an Atlantic liner. Where our gunners have to tackle a maze of levers and bolts the French have about three to deal with, and it looks as though a boy of ten could learn it all thoroughly in a quarter of an hour.

And, of course, the French gunner is devoted to his "·75." With a sympathetic audience he is as happy and proud as a lover to tell of the

charms of a beautiful mistress. He will show you how the first round fired fixes the gun so firmly in position that every succeeding shell can fall within a couple of yards of the first; and he can fire twenty rounds or more a minute with a good man to load. The German can manage eleven only. Then he will balance a glass of water or a halfpenny on the gun-wheel, and so clean is the discharge and recoil that the water will not be spilled. And he will tell how, within thirty or forty seconds of a demand through the telephone, his battery can lower such a curtain of shell fire as to render quite impassable a zone of ground perhaps twice the length of that occupied by his guns. Truly a remarkable weapon, as the enemy know to their cost; and, in the hands of French gunners, typical of the genius of the French nation.

Some units went all the way by road, others partly by train and motor-bus. Those going by road found the journey most enjoyable, for the route lay through a beautiful countryside untouched, save in one or two places, by the ravages of war. Mareuil-sur-Ourcq, Senlis, Amiens to Abbeville was the road. Not very many were lucky enough to secure a day in Abbeville, but to those who were it seemed like a tiny glimpse of Paradise with the beautiful old buildings and fine shops and excellent restaurants.

Last, but certainly not least, were the baths. And, oh! the joy of a real big bath and unlimited hot water! The first real bath for nearly two months; and it had to last for another two months or so. For an extra 25 centimes you got a little muslin bag of lavender soap-powder. How one wallowed—the only word! Do you remember the lines in Kipling's "Back to the Army again?"

If you were to ask an officer who took that road what his most vivid impression had been he would probably reply—— Guess! No, I am sure you won't! Well, the number of girls' schools there were. Who the billeting officer was I do not know; but he certainly possessed a sense of humour. You would halt in the town or village where you were to stay for the few hours, and there would be the billeting officer and interpreter waiting with a little sheaf of papers to allot the billets.

"Major Landale, Captain Richards and Second Lieutenant Wiley, I've got an excellent place for you in the girls' school down by the church," he would say gravely. "You will be very comfortable."

Can you not see Wiley, pulling his tie straight and flicking the dust from his boots as he starts off down the street in ever such a hurry in case that very accommodating billeting officer should change his mind? Then Richards sud-

denly remembers that he must find a job for his junior subaltern which will keep him busy for a spell. So off he starts in pursuit.

The Major, being a dignified individual, as befits a commanding officer, follows more leisurely. But I should not be surprised if he, too, were not turning over in his mind a possible job for his captain.

Wiley and Richards made a dead heat of it. But how curious! Where is that cheerful sound of merry laughter and quaint giggles which one always associates with a well-conducted seminary for young ladies? The place is silent as the grave. Wiley tries so hard to look unconcerned as he rings the bell.

Steps down the passage and the door opens to reveal—oh, yes, there is no doubt about it—the somewhat hard-featured dame of uncertain age who yet beams benignly through her spectacles at her visitors—the guardian dragon.

"But enter, messieurs; I am very happy to receive you. And you will remain quite undisturbed, for my girls still make their holidays. Tout va bien, n'est ce pas?"

Our gallant officers are understood cordially to agree; but there will be wigs on the green the next time they come across that very accommodating and sympathetic billeting officer.

Coincidence or no, a girls' school was the selected billet at three out of the five halts. The

climax came when a famous and popular General discovered that he had been given one for his H.Q. This time the girls were actually in residence, but they were promptly bundled off home by the dragon-in-charge, much to the disgust of the junior officers and—dare one add?—somewhat to the regret of the young ladies themselves.

So, then, you picture the columns trekking hard northwards. Gone are the vineyards and lovely uplands of the Aisne country, the deep forest glades of Compiègne, and now, from a glimpse of the sea near Abbeville, guns, horse and foot are streaming into and across the dark manufacturing district, the Black Country of France. The vivid contrast strikes everyone, and it is not a little depressing. The weather turns stormy and colder, and there is a heavy presage in the air of the stern winter months which are to follow.

The Second Cavalry Division (General Gough) and Second Corps are the first to arrive, and they join on to the extreme north of the extended French line hard by La Bassée. A country this of railways, canals, and low-lying fields cut by pollard-fringed streams, of gaunt chimneys and curious, mis-shapen manufacturing plant, of dismal slag heaps and hillocks of slate and rubble.

Next follow the Third Corps coming round

by St. Omer, in which town G.H.Q. were soon established; and, finally, came the First Corps, arriving on October 19. The last of the Seven Divisions had yet to appear.

The race for the seacoast was ended and won, but by the narrowest margin. The first few days quickly brought home to everyone that it was no longer a question of outflanking the enemy. It was to be a grim struggle to the death in which the British were once again to play their historic part. The thin line, stretched taut along a front of forty miles, must once more stand on the defensive and hold, if it may, the overwhelming massed attacks of an invading host.

Our country's frontiers are high-water mark on the enemy's coasts. With the Channel ports and coast in German hands the danger to England, despite the "sure shield" of the Navy, would be very real. At home, while there was the hint of an awakening, the cry was "Business as Usual." A few score miles from London seven little divisions were mustering for the last, the greatest, of all the great fights of the old Regular Army. It was for England, and upon Her very frontiers. A worthy and a noble end!

# XIII

## THE FIRST DAYS IN FLANDERS

K. Hen. *Either our history shall with full mouth*
*Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,*
*Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,*
*Not worshipp'd with a waxen epitaph.*

It is no purpose of this narrative to follow in detail the course of the operations—indeed that would be wellnigh impossible in a single volume. The stage is now set in an arena so vast, the drama goes forward in such a maze of action that you who sit imagined spectators of the scene can hope for no more than a series of dim impressions of the whole. And just as the spectator sitting at the edge of such a stage is apt to find his ideas most strongly coloured by the events which befall immediately in front of him, so the author hopes that he may by his illustrations of stray incidents truthfully suggest the character of the entire drama.

For each incident is but a part of the whole. Walk round the arena, and you will find it reproduced a hundred times in as many varying forms, and all with the single end in view. In capacity for self-sacrifice and heroism there is nothing to choose between the fighting men of

the three Allies embattled in one long line against the invader.

Pause for a moment at the northern end to watch the gallant little remnant of the Belgian Army, war-worn and battered by two months of incredible hardship and fighting, thrust back foot by foot across their ravaged country-side, until at last they stand at bay in the last little corner which remains to them. Peer through the rolling waves of smoke and flame and you will see the kingly figure of their noble Leader as he walks to and fro along the ranks with words of praise, of hope and encouragement. And, at the last, when all is done that mortal man can do, behold him give the command to open the great dykes and flood the country, determining rather to restore to the sea his dearly loved land than yield it to the mercy of such an enemy.

And as our Belgian Allies held with us the road to the coast, you will not grudge the record of one act of gallantry taken from scores which the Belgians performed in those days.

A German company, with machine-guns, was holding a farm on the edge of the flooded country. Between them and the Belgian trenches there flowed a swift stream, too deep to ford, too broad for planking. But near at hand was a heavy wooden bridge which the country-

folk worked to the stream by means of a great lever. Just now the Germans held it, raised on their own side.

The Belgians determined to clear the enemy out of the farm; but to do this the bridgehead must first be won and the bridge swung over. Volunteers were called for. It was a desperate, deadly task. The first man crept out from the trench; he was shot down before ever he reached the river bank. A second followed; he, too, fell, but a little nearer to the enemy.

A third crept out, a young lad of nineteen years. Throwing himself flat on the ground, he wriggled along to the bank. Just as he reached the water, two bullets took him in shoulder and hand. Into the river he plunged and swam steadily forward as the bullets rained down about him and churned the water to foam. His comrades, ready for the supreme moment, watched him anxiously, not daring to speak.

Steadily forward, and now he is half-way across. A bullet cuts through his scalp, another tears his ear, and he disappears under the water. A fourth volunteer prepares to follow, when suddenly the head of the swimmer appears again and near to the shelter of the farther bank. A hoarse cheer from his friends, and he nerves himself to his task.

Hand over hand he climbs up the bridge supports and grasps the lever. Almost exhausted,

yet he throws his weight to it, and the bridge begins to sway and dip. The Germans hastily run for a machine-gun to place at a commanding window of the house, firing madly with their rifles the while.

Now the bridge begins to swing down, but, oh, so slowly to the anxious watchers on the far side. Lower still, and now it swings to its own weight, while ever the young Belgian clings to the lever. With a clash the bridge falls into place, and on the moment the Belgians are out of their trench and half-way across. The heaviest machine-gun fire cannot stop them, and with one mighty rush they carry the enemy position.

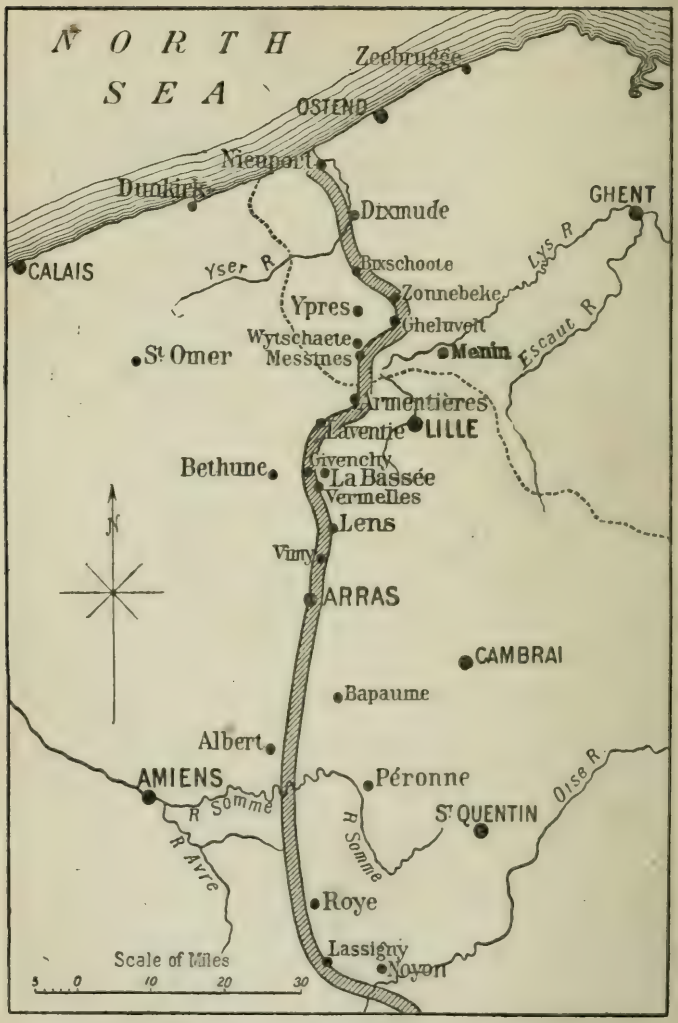
Gently his comrades loosen their young hero's arms from the lever, which he grips fast even in death. With a last salute they buried him close by the bridgehead which he won, and which, they tell me, the Belgians still hold to his memory.

A week or so before the Belgians opened the sluice gates to flood the country, and almost simultaneously with the arrival of the British from the Aisne, there appeared off the coast three or four strange ships newly commissioned in H.M. Navy. Monitors, they called them, and being heavily armed and protected and drawing but little water, they were able to come close in shore and shell the German right flank. The practical help thus given to the hard-pressed

Belgians and French at the northern end of the line was very great, but possibly of even more value was the heartening moral effect produced by the appearance of ships belonging to the "all-powerful" British Navy. Our Allies felt that at last there was big support behind them with a promise of more to come.

I wish that I could tell, too, of other incidents in this northern area, of the invaluable help given by the French Marines and others, but the tale would be wellnigh endless. You must turn to other volumes.

The British line, about thirty miles in length, ran from Bixschoote in the north to Givenchy in the south. Ypres, you will see from the map (p. 194), is just south of Bixschoote, where the line made a sweeping salient to the east, guarding Ypres and returning to the diagonal north and south by Messines. It should be noted that immediately to the north of the Second Corps came Conneau's French Cavalry Division, so that here, as at one or two other points, the British had a sprinkling of French troops to help them. It was a line for which there were no reserves available, and from October 11, when the Second Corps came into position, until nearly a month later when the first great Battle of Ypres had begun to die away, every man was in all day and every day.




MAP OF THE ALLIED LINE FROM NOYON TO THE COAST.

It was a remarkably close thing, that race for the sea, and one cannot help thinking that had the Germans struck hard in the region of Ypres some time during the week following the arrival of the Second Corps they would have won through. The Allies were building up troops from the south, and there were already the Belgians in the north. But between these two forces there was still a gap, and the gate was not flung to and barred until October 19, when the First Corps arrived. For a few days this part of the line was being held by the Seventh Division and Third Cavalry Division. Of the mighty deeds of these Immortals something must be said later.

If it is so difficult for the spectator to follow clearly the course of the action in this great arena, it may be imagined how enormous is the task which falls to a Commander-in-Chief in the directing of it. Even with the most elaborate system of telegraph and telephone, the whole-hearted aid of aircraft and the Intelligence system, and the most loyal of Staff work, it would seem a physical impossibility for one man to keep a responsive touch upon the hundred pulses of a modern battle-line, his own and the enemy's.

He must, one supposes, keep in mind a general plan drawn out upon broad lines, and leave the execution very much to the discretion of the subordinate commanders. Sometimes the

Chief *knows* that the work can be accomplished if the troops play up to him; sometimes the scheme is only one of two or three alternatives. If it fails, another will be tried.

This somewhat trite observation is made to remind the reader of the very great difficulties which existed at this time in Flanders, and of the impossibility (so one imagines) of gauging accurately the strength of the enemy and his possible plans. It is a proud thing that we should be thrilled by the unwavering heroism of our soldiers in the face of overwhelming odds, such as they were during the first year or so of this war, but there will come a time when our people will inquire why they always had to fight at such a disadvantage.

The Allied Commanders, then, had two or three definite alternative plans in view when the British arrived in Flanders. Whether any of them would succeed no one could tell. At least, each one of them involved *attack* in some form. But again, as at Mons, a scheme of attack was doomed to failure. The British worked desperately at the several points assigned to them, but always as they advanced they found themselves battling against continually increasing numbers, and so were forced to the defensive. These were the opening stages of the fighting in Flanders; let me try to give you some idea of the general character of the work. Remember that it was

not yet fully realised that it was to be a battle for the coast; it was hoped that we might be able to cut in to the enemy's right flank, or possibly to break his main line of communications.

At the close of the preceding chapter I gave a hint of the main features of this new countryside—a slice of industrial Yorkshire or the Potteries dropped into the flat water country of Essex, Norfolk, or the Fens. There was only one hill, and that quite a little one, in the district.

During the past six weeks our men had experienced a remarkable variety of fighting. Now another kind was added to the list—the close infighting of villages and many waterways, yet with the use of modern explosives. Londoners actually had an admirable illustration of it a few years ago in the extraordinary episode of the "Sidney Street Siege (Whitechapel)," when Peter the Painter held a company of the Guards at bay in a London street with an automatic pistol. It may be remembered that Mr. Winston Churchill proposed to send for a field-gun to shell the house, so difficult was the situation.

If you will imagine the difficulties of that little episode of a London street increased a hundredfold by barbed wire entanglements, sandbags, barricades, machine-guns, and all the other devilries of modern war, you will get some idea of what our troops had to tackle in capturing

a village house by house. And the incredible thing was that in those days our guns had no high explosive shell with which to smash down the buildings. It was at the very end of October that the first tiny supply of H.E. was issued to batteries by way of an experiment and to see how it worked. This was through no fault of G.H.Q., for there was no H.E. at home.[1] As again and again one recalls facts like this and the disabilities under which our men so often worked, their achievement appears still more marvellous.

You see, then, in your little corner of the arena, the infantry of the Second Corps swinging out into an extended line on the dismal, misty morning of October 12. "Push ahead" is the order of the day. Behind them battery commanders are selecting positions for their guns, and cursing heartily because there are no pleasant little spots from which to "observe" the fire. In fact, it was difficult enough to find sensible gun positions with any open field of fire available; and when it was a case of advancing the battery generally found itself held up by some muggy, sluggish stream, or a coal pit, or a row of workmen's cottages.

The Middlesex began their day with a de-

[1] *Cf.* "The Retreat from Mons," page 79, where it is recorded that during the Retreat a large percentage of our casualties was due to German H.E. shell.

pressing experience. They were across one of the main roads, when down the road towards them came a black mass of people. Taking it for another German trick, the battery in support was rung up and told to be ready.

Nearer came the swarm, and the Adjutant who was looking through his glasses paused to wipe the lenses, thinking that something had gone wrong with them. Right in front of the advance there plodded steadily a huge gipsy caravan covered all over with pots and pans, bird-cages, bedding, clocks and other odds and ends. The caravan seemed to be moving by some sort of machinery, but when it came nearer it was seen that there was a diminutive donkey between the shafts.

The appearance of the thing and the contrast was so comic that all the men burst out laughing. But the laughter was soon changed to murmurs of astonishment and pity. Close behind there followed rank upon rank of old men and women, young girls and children; perambulators filled with little household treasures, pitifully foolish they seemed; crazy carts, with decrepit ponies or panting dogs to pull them, jammed wheel to wheel with a fine Daimler motor-car crammed full with carcasses of sheep and chickens, or a brougham filled with fire-irons and a "grand-father" clock.

The Middlesex opened their ranks, and the

stream poured through. The women and men looked neither to right nor left. On they trudged, with faces set stonily to the road before them. They had wept once, but now there were no tears left to give blessed relief. In dozens, in scores, in hundreds they passed, until the men of the Middlesex grew dizzy with the black pageant of sorrow. The Germans were somewhere behind them, a young girl said over her shoulder as she shifted a baby from one arm to the other.

Such rations as they had the Middlesex handed out with a cheery word of would-be encouragement. There passed an old, old man in a tattered uniform, on which shone the cross of the Légion d'Honneur; he trailed his musket of 1870. Barefoot he trudged, his feet cut and bleeding with the pavé road, and he leaned upon the arm of a girl, his granddaughter perhaps, who supported him tenderly. As they passed, the Adjutant drew himself up and saluted. And the girl threw herself at the officer's feet, seizing his hand to kiss it, murmuring broken words.

So they all passed. Just a few hundreds out of the millions harried and hunted by the Hun-hounds. Where were they to go? What were they to do? God knows. "It is all a part of the great game of War; these do not matter," say the Hun-hounds. "Only wait until we land in England! Then shall you see our methods."

The Middlesex and other battalions pushed slowly forward in extended lines. French cavalry, with ours, were out in advance. Scouting work in those days was a very ticklish business, as you may guess, for scattered parties of Germans would be found lurking in all sorts of places, expected and unexpected. And the by-roads twisted and turned in such bewildering fashion that often our men would find themselves attacking an enemy outpost from the rear. A country like this where the Second Corps was working is much better adapted for defence than attack, just as is our own English country-side, with its many woods and hedgerows, its little fields and rambling lanes.

It was equally bewildering in the case of the villages, for you could never tell whether or no they would be occupied by the enemy. A cavalry squadron would advance, dismounted, crawling forward through the outskirts of a little town and expect to tumble across a nest of machine-guns at any moment. Instead, they might well find themselves greeted by a bevy of blithesome damsels bearing jugs of beer and other refreshment particularly grateful to hungry and thirsty warriors. There would follow a few minutes' interlude of the character generally associated with a meeting between cheery khaki-clad warriors and blithesome French demoiselles (I refrain from giving the name of the regiment in

case some young ladies at home might have a word to say), and the squadron would be off and away to the next point.

And the very next village, although on the same line of front, might be barricaded and loop-holed and held strongly by the enemy in every house. And there was no way of telling until the men found themselves under sudden fire. The erstwhile inhabitants have formed a part of that mournful procession which has just passed.

There was one hamlet of a single straggling street which looked safe enough, and the patrol leader determined to take it at the gallop. Fifty yards off, with the place as silent as the grave, they clapped spurs to their horses and started. Round a bend in the road they came full tilt at an unexpected barrier across the street. The leader, with the first files hard upon his heels, cleared it in his stride and landed right on top of a dozen crouching Germans. At the same moment a couple of machine-guns began to bark from the windows of the houses opposite, and our men found themselves in a trap with a second barricade farther down the street. Four or five of the horses had refused the jump, and after a few minutes' stern hand-to-hand fighting the whole party was shot down with the exception of a couple of troopers who got back to warn the infantry behind.

The story was much the same with the infantry, faced by these awkward conditions. The contest was always too unequal, and our casualties were exceedingly heavy. There was nothing in the nature of a battle, but just an endless series of little fights in which our men always attacked prepared positions. The gunners, needless to say, backed up the infantry as well as they could, but they, too, were equally handicapped, for the average field-gun firing shrapnel is of little use against houses. In the first two days of this advance a couple of battalions had as many as 900 casualties amongst N.C.O.'s and rank and file, and I do not know how many amongst the officers.

The infantry fought their way forward hour after hour, with never a pause day or night for five days; just dropped down where they stood for odd snatches of sleep. You will get some idea of the way they were engaged from the fact that on October 13 and 14 the 18-pr. field guns of one single Division (nine batteries) fired in support approximately 13,500 shells.

This may seem little enough against the tremendous expenditure of ammunition in later days, but in 1914 the organisation of ammunition supply, from the base to the railhead, from railhead via motor-lorries to the Divisions and so on, was never intended to grapple with so heavy a demand. Yet somehow or another, as

in every other department, the strain was met, and neither guns nor men went short until—but that shall be told later, in its place.

There were many reverses during those misty October days, but there was one in particular which sent a little gasp of dismay from Corps H.Q. right through to the rear. Two famous County battalions especially were hard hit, but the day was a black one for the entire Brigade.

It happened down near Givenchy. The enemy had been strongly reinforced, and they determined upon a counter-attack. It was finely carried out, and the Bedfords had to bear the brunt. The attack was too strong for them, and the Bedfords were gradually driven back, clinging hard to every point, as a man does when he is swept away by a strong current.

Unhappily, though, their retirement laid bare the flank of their neighbours, the Dorsets, as well as that of four guns which were in support. The enemy swung half left and took the West Countrymen on this exposed flank.

There was no need for an urgent message back to the guns, for the guns were caught in as heavy a storm as the infantry. The gunners ceased their fire for a minute to man the gun-wheels and trails and run the guns back a little

to change the direction of fire. But half the detachments were down before they could do so. Still they worked to it, and with a big effort got one of the guns in action in the right direction without masking the fire of the others.

The Dorsets could do but little to protect themselves. To swing back their own flank only meant leaving the poor shelter of hastily dug trenches to fight in the open. They were caught; no supports were available; and whether they stayed or tried to retire they seemed doomed men. To stay meant annihilation; in retiring some might get through.

So they staggered out into the pitiless storm and started back in open order by short rushes.

"Where be they guns o' ours?" said a man to his next file during a moment's pause. "We've not a-yeard vrom 'em vor a spell."

"Hold yer clacker, carn't 'ee! They be hevin' as warm a time as we, I dessay," replied next file.

Alas! he was only too correct. The guns were not firing because there was no one left to serve them. Every man of the detachments, the officer and Nos. 1, all were down, dead or dying, where they had kneeled by their guns.

The lines of the Dorset men, pitifully thinned by now, were swept back. Still they dropped to fire a clip of cartridges, jumped to their feet, bending double, ramming home a

new clip in time for their next turn. So they got back, back past the guns where each stood mute by its little pile of dead.

A subaltern of the Dorsets leaned for a moment against a gun-wheel, catching his breath in short, hard gasps. A thought struck him. Crouching to the ground he hastily examined the gun. Yes, it had been made useless, the breech block was all jammed and twisted. The next? Yes, that too. The third? An enemy shell had smashed that. The last? But a bullet caught the young officer in the side before he could reach it. Still, he dragged himself across the little space which yet seemed endless and got to the gun. It seemed intact.

He knew little enough about guns, but he guessed that if he got the breech-block out or smashed it this would be better than nothing. So he set to work with a spanner lying near and by good luck hit on the right bolt and pulled the block free. With a last conscious effort he hurled it away into the stream close at hand and collapsed across the gun-trail. There some of his men found him five minutes later, and within an hour or so he was in hospital in Bethune.

One Gunner, at least, salutes in gratitude a very gallant gentleman of Dorset.

But in the battalion that day the Dorsets lost some 400 men and many officers. A black

list, indeed, and especially severely felt in any one of our County Regiments. For those Regiments are as little families where the Colonel Commanding is indeed the father, and where the loss of a member is mourned as that of a brother. When the Regiment is ordered on active service the men of an English County go forth to fight for their homes and their women folk, with a pride and hope in their hearts such as can never be known in a regiment recruited from all over the Kingdom.

It is, I think, deeply to be regretted that our people are told so very little of the deeds of these splendid County Regiments of ours. The Old Army has shown that it works and fights as one magnificent unit, Horse, Guns and Foot, and its members, I know, resent the bestowal of special praise, however splendidly earned, upon what may be termed the more "popular" Regiments while other Regiments, equally deserving, seem to be passed over.

The County Regiments do their duty, and more than their duty, very quietly and without talking. They do not advertise. But it is the County Regiments which have made the British Army. Look back through the great wars of the past and note the names of the men who followed Marlborough and Wellington, aye, right back to the yeomen of Agincourt and Crécy.

The men from the West Country, the hillsmen and dalesmen of Yorkshire, the men of Kent, of Surrey, of Essex and Northumberland, of Worcester and Warwick, and a score more. These be your Englishmen who stand for England and the pageant of her fair Counties. Let Her people know this, and then let them humbly thank God that England can yet breed such men to stand for Her against the enemy and keep Her safely.

## XIV

## "As We Forgive Them"

### (An Interlude)

K. Hen. *Upon the King! Let us our lives, our souls,*
*Our debts, our careful wives,*
*Our children, and our sins, lay on the King!—*
*We must bear all.*

Gaunt-set against the dreary, wasted fields of that still inviolate corner of Belgium there stood a wayside Crucifix. The setting sun stabbed into the poisonous haze of bursting shells with bloody swords of light; and dimly through the choking fumes the Christ looked inscrutably down upon the skeleton rafters and battered walls of the little village.

A Belgian Officer stood at the cross roads. For some minutes he had been listening intently to and identifying the reports of the distant enemy guns, making quick notes in a book. A heavy shell dropped and burst some twenty yards down the road and, almost unconsciously, he moved closer to the Crucifix. As he did so a shaft of light pierced through the haze and fell clear upon the Face, curving the lips (or so it seemed) into a tender smile.

The Officer bent his head in a moment's

silent prayer; then resumed his work of observation. The roar of the enemy guns redoubled in intensity, and a storm of shells poured over and through the torn roofs and walls. "Possibly there will still be left some living creatures, women, perhaps, and children, who need killing. This evening's 'hate' should finish them."

From the cellar of a house which stood apart outside the village a timid procession of some ten or twelve children came cautiously up into the twilight. School had lasted a little longer than usual, for the "hate" had begun half an hour earlier. Generally it was possible to be at home ere it started.

Close along the hedge they crept, holding one another fast by the hand. Pitifully nervous, pinched with starvation, shrunken little arms and legs shining dimly through rents in torn coats and skirts, so they came by the image of One Who, many centuries ago, had beckoned little children to Him.

First of the line went Jeanne-Marie, always the dear leader. Only a close observer could have seen the terror which would spring to the calm grey eyes, for the dark curly head was held so bravely.

"Let us hasten," she said; "the good mother will be anxious."

The children clung more closely to each other and hurried on. A howitzer shell burst true in

the middle of the road barely a stone's throw in front of Jeanne-Marie.

With a shrill scream of terror they turned to run back to shelter. "Help! Save us," they cried in their agony of fear.

Jeanne-Marie pressed her hands over her aching temples. "Bravely, little ones," she cried. "We should be brave. See, le bon Dieu; let us say our prayers."

And so at the foot of the Cross the children knelt meekly down. Twelve tiny heads bent reverently over the folded hands. The Officer stood close behind as though he would guard them; while around and above a legion of devils shrieked and sported over their hellish toys.

"Our Father," said Jeanne-Marie, lifting her poor wan face to meet the Eyes which gazed steadfastly down upon the little suppliants.

"Which art in Heaven," the children echoed bravely after her. "Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom Come." The Officer took a step forward and knelt by little Pierre. The devils still laughed in derision.

"Thy will be done on Earth," prayed Jeanne-Marie. "As it is in Heaven," the children and the Officer followed her. And the heart of the world throbbed up to God in the petition from those tender lips.

There was a moaning crash as the remaining walls of one of the houses near by fell in an

avalanche of masonry. A small yellow mongrel dog dragged itself painfully along the ground towards the children, its piteous howls drowned in the unholy din.

"Give us this day our Daily Bread." And the Officer hid his face in his hands, for he could not bear to look upon the poor pinched faces by his side.

"And forgive us our trespasses," prayed Jeanne-Marie, "as——. And forgive us our trespasses," murmured the children. But they could go no farther. The yellow mongrel had reached its tiny master and, with a choking sigh, fell dead across his knees.

Pierre buried his head in the shaggy coat. The other children looked hopelessly towards Jeanne-Marie and then towards their shattered homes. The clouds of smoke drifted blood-red over the ruins.

"And forgive us our trespasses, as——" they began once more.

But it was another voice which responded.

"As we forgive them which trespass against us."

The Officer had risen from his knees and now stood beneath the Cross, one hand resting upon the Sacred Feet. The children looked up and they recognised him at last.

For the Officer was Albert, King of the Belgians.

# XV

## THE COMING OF THE INDIANS

EXE. *Your brother kings and monarchs of the earth*
*Do all expect that you should rouse yourself,*
*As did the former lions of your blood.*
WEST. *They know your grace hath cause and means and might;*
*So hath your highness—never King of England*
*Had nobles richer and more loyal subjects.*

WHEN the history of these times comes to be written there will be no more glowing pages in that great record of endeavour and achievement than those which tell of the rally to the Flag by the Overseas Dominions and Dependencies. And wonderful beyond all will be the story of India, "the fairest jewel in the Crown."

In Germany's deep-laid plans for a "reckoning with her greatest enemy," as soon as France and Russia had been disposed of, there was one fact upon which she counted as absolutely certain, and that was the insurrection of native India. It is one of the many striking instances of Germany's ridiculous belief that other peoples must think and act as Germany would; and of her complete failure to appreciate the real meaning and purpose of Empire as viewed by Eng-

land. For the British Empire is not based upon Materialism, but upon Imagination.

So when the call came India did indeed rise as one man—but to stand by the side of the British Raj. The Princes of her peoples did not wait to call for evidence nor to argue about the justness of the cause. They *knew* the cause must be a righteous one, and with one great heart and soul they offered themselves, their men, and their treasure to further it. And when they had offered all that they had to give they besought the King to issue his further commands.

As with the Princes and nobles so it was with the people. In every corner of the Indian Empire the men of the mountains and the plains hastened to the banners of their chieftains. Men who three little months before were counted bitter political agitators were the first to call upon their countrymen to fight for the English Sahib. And so they came flocking in. From far away Tibet, the dim, mysterious "Roof of the World," and the mountains of Kashmir to the uplands of Kandy; from the river jungles and swamps of Burma to the blinding sands of Baluchistan they rallied to the call.

And the women of India, what had they to give? Their husbands, sons and brothers? They gave them proudly. Their treasure, their little savings, their jewels and trinkets? Unfaltering they poured them into the common treasury.

And when there was no more to give they could yet offer up hands of prayer for their loved ones and the success of their fighting.

Truly, as Mr. John Buchan remarks, "the British soldiers and civilians who had found lonely graves between the Himalaya and Cape Comorin had not lived and died in vain when the result of their toil was this splendid and unfaltering loyalty."

In the roll of India's great Princes who rode out to war with their men no name is more famous or more honoured than that of Major-General H.H. Sir Pratap Singh Bahadur. They say that long years ago he swore never to die in his bed. Now, when over seventy, he hoped that his oath might be fulfilled, and thus he came to France.

It was during the last days of September that the Indian contingents began to arrive and disembark at Marseilles. First came the Lahore Division under Major-General Watkis, then the Meerut Division under Major-General Anderson, and later the Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade and the Jodhpur Lancers. General Sir James Willcocks was in command of the Corps.

The Regiments included in the Corps worthily represented all that is finest in the fighting strength of our Indian Army. Battalions of famous Sikh Regiments, Companies of the

Sappers and Miners, Bhopal Infantry, Gurkha Rifles, Baluchis, the Scinde Rifles, the Jats, and Vaughan's Indian Rifles, while amongst the Cavalry were crack regiments like the Deccan and the Poona Horse. A brave array!

For most of the men it had been a great adventure that voyage from India, for it was the first time they had ever seen the sea. It required a deal of persuasion at Bombay on the part of their British officers to get many of the men on board at all. Eastern races are not troubled overmuch with nerves, and they are accustomed to take things as they come with philosophical resignation. But those great moving castles which rocked up and down upon this amazing new element—that was too much, and they feared the worst.

Nor was the worst long in coming. "Our hearts and entrails became as water and heaved within us," a stalwart Sikh was heard to remark afterwards when the bitterness of death had passed away and they were safely on shore once more. And it can hardly have been a merry voyage, with the men lying in rows upon the deck, tightly clasping their bodies lest their stomachs should melt utterly away, and in a dozen dialects calling Heaven to witness their piteous plight.

But the joyous welcome which they received in sunny Marseilles from the excited and impres-

sionable French of the South made ample amends, and with life flowing again through their veins they counted the hours until they could play their part in the Sahibs' war.

For a spell the men were kept in camp farther north in the hope that they might become a little acclimatised, but events were moving so rapidly, and the need of reinforcements was so urgent, that the Lahore Division was railed forward and brought up to Bethune on October 20.

They arrived in the nick of time for the Second Corps. For ten days and nights General Smith-Dorrien's troops had been fighting without rest as they had not had to fight since that great day at Le Cateau, and they were nearly at the end of their tether. Within a few days the Indian Division received its baptism in the fire of modern war. The enemy had taken the village of Neuve Chapelle, and the Indians, supported by British troops, were ordered to recapture it.

And here, if you will, you must try to imagine in some measure how these first glimpses of modern war appeared to Indian troops. Our Indian Army, British and Native, is, you must know, kept always in the very pink of condition. Its training is carried on under conditions closely akin to those of active service, and such as are

impossible to our Home Army. In fact, one might say that one part or another of the Indian Army is always on active service, at work somewhere on the frontiers of India.

The valour of the Gurkhas, Baluchis, Sikhs and other fighting peoples is a household word throughout our Empire, and we have come to expect great things of them. But no army in the world could train adequately for modern war, because it was only possible to guess but vaguely and within definite limits what it would be like. No one, for instance, could really picture the devastating effect of big gun fire. (Remember the surprise and shock caused by those big German guns at the Aisne.) No one realised what trench warfare would be like, nor the appalling slaughter caused by machine-guns.

You must picture, then, these troops, the bravest of the brave in clear fighting, thrust into the murderous hell of suffocating high explosive shell and quick-firers. You must see them struggling hopelessly against an unseen enemy who rains down death upon them from guns five miles away.

"But, sahib, why did you not tell us?" said a Baluchi to his company commander; "why did you not teach us this warfare?"—and there was a whole world of pathos in the remark. For how could it be taught, save by bitter experience?

And the lesson, taught though it was at last by experience, was a long one ere it was learned. With the battle-ardour of those men, soldiers from their childhood, and with the blood of a hundred generations of soldiers in their veins, it was impossible to keep them under cover in the trenches. They would not stay down. The sight of those serried ranks of blue-grey uniforms drove them mad. At last there was the enemy they had come to fight!

"Sahib, sahib," they would cry, "we are not children and cowards to skulk behind earthworks."

And over the parapet they hurled themselves in a frenzy. There was no holding them.

Such was the tale when a battalion of Sikhs went into action for the first time. It was horrible. Barely a tenth of the number struggled back to shelter. The remainder—mown down before they had gone twenty-five yards.

But God help the Germans when the Sikhs or Gurkhas did get to close quarters with them! It may sound bloodthirsty, but one felt that just retribution was being taken for the thousand nameless atrocities, for the massacre of women and children. The sight of those great bearded men, the crimson turbans gleaming above their swarthy faces, the blood-lust in their eyes as they came crashing into a trench, seemed to

fascinate and paralyse the Germans, striking them helpless.

By the end of October the fighting at the southern end of our line had developed into a desperate defence. The casualties in the Second Corps had been very heavy. In a little over a fortnight they had lost 360 officers and 8,200 men. In one day alone 65 officers and 1,600 men were counted out; while the West Kents, one of the most famous of all the County Regiments, who had been clinging hard to a hopeless position for ten days and nights, fought on until they had but two officers (Second Lieutenants) and 150 men left. But never a yard of ground did the enemy wrest from them. It was a feat of iron courage and stern endurance which has rarely been equalled and never excelled in this war.

But the infantry had reached the limits of human endurance. They must be withdrawn, there was no other alternative. The Indian Corps, with its two Divisions and Cavalry now complete, were ready to replace them. So the exhausted troops were taken out of the line, the artillery still remaining, and the Indians stepped into the breach. It should be mentioned that in each Indian Infantry Brigade there is included a British battalion.

The good folk of the Pas-de-Calais will long tell the story of how India came to France and

dwelt among them. For a few brief months this hard-featured, drab-tinted land of industry was "made glorious summer" by the glittering trappings of the sunny East. It was indeed a curious experience to turn from an old French town with its mediæval church and homely market-square where voluble French housewives haggled over the price of carrots and potatoes and find yourself in a quarter which, apart from the houses, might have been the corner of an Indian bazaar which one knows so well.

Here down the street would pass lordly Sikh and lithe Pathan in unconscious dignity intent on the business of the moment. A quaint, ramshackle cart, with its heavily-spoked wheels and a mule between the cumbrous shafts, would rub axles with a staff motor-car. In a doorway lounge a group of British officers in the sun-helmets and tropical khaki uniforms of the East. Turn aside from the road into a small compound (the word is inevitable) and you sense at once the curious, parchment odour of the East mingled with the smoke of wood-fires, the faintly acrid smell of ghee bubbling in a pot, the cooking scents of strange spice-laden concoctions. Close against a tent two grey-headed veterans squat upon the ground impassively grinding at a quern, with never a glance at the terrified "baa" from a goat a dozen yards away being killed for dinner. Here and there crouch figures

closely wrapped in blankets against the cold, nothing visible of them save a hawk-like nose and two glittering eyes.

It was a serious responsibility this bringing over of the Indian troops at such a time, and it has been much criticised. The cold, biting weather, the sleet and icy slush of Flanders, the rain-soaked fogs combined to play havoc with the health and moral of these children of the sun. And yet it is difficult to see what else could have been done without giving offence and damping the noble ardour of the Princes of India. The Indian Government knew full well the conditions of a northern winter, and they must have represented the facts to the Indian leaders. But apart from the fighting value of such splendid material, it must have been recognised that the moral effect of their presence in France would prove a tremendous asset—as indeed it did. Doubtless the original idea was to give the men more time to become accustomed to the new conditions before bringing them into the firing-line, but, as I have remarked, the position became so serious that reinforcements had to be brought in at any cost.

And yet it was very sad to the splendid Indian Cavalry to be used for the dismounted, rough-and-tumble work of the trenches. It had to be, and right loyally they responded to every summons. But one could not help recalling their record, proudly inherited from sires who warred

against Alexander of Macedon, as horsemen second to none in the world. There is, however, little room for sentiment in war.

One incident, in which a Sikh figured, was typical of many others, and well shows what these men do when they get a real chance at close quarters.

It was in a fight for a village, and a Sikh, finding that the enemy were firing from a first-floor window, entered the house and ran upstairs. Bursting open the door of the front room he found just a dozen Germans inside. Silently he set to work with the steel.

After he had killed eight of the twelve he marshalled the remaining four, barely able to stand from terror, marched them downstairs and back to his commanding officer, and very simply told his story.

"Why did you not kill all of them?" said the officer jokingly.

"I began to feel tired," the Sikh replied. "But," stretching out his sword-arm, "I am rested now. I will finish."

The Germans bolted off hard down the road with their hands up, and did not stop running till they could throw themselves on the ground before the first British soldier they came across.

When at the Aisne the news came round that the Indian Corps was on its way to France

everyone at once exclaimed, "What a hell of a time they'll give the Germans in night work!" For we all felt instinctively that that was their real job. Those of us who knew the Far East could well foresee the trouble there would be with native races in face of the German shells and machine-guns, and how reckless they would be in attack. But the creeping out at night and slipping into the German trenches with the *kukri*, and so keeping the Boche's nerves continually on edge—that was the very thing, and we waited impatiently for the fun to begin.

On most nights there were attacks of a kind, generally trifling affairs, little expeditions to cut wire, to clear up an awkward corner and so forth. But I well remember the first real night attack in which Indians were engaged, for it chanced to have happened on the same evening as a birthday celebration of mine, in which four of us had done justice to a tiny plum-pudding sent out from home. "And all merry," as Pepys would say.

It was close upon midnight when the curtain was rung up upon the first act. The scene is the long, low-raftered kitchen of a farm-house not far distant from the well-known "railway triangle" in the Bethune district. By the light of a few smoky oil-lamps half a dozen officers

*Photograph: Vandyk, Ltd*

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL H.H. SIR PRATAP SINGH

of the Black Watch are poring over a large-scale map spread upon the table. Close against the hearth Stewart, the last joined subaltern, sits carefully cleaning his revolver; opposite him another officer is cramming a few sandwiches and some chocolate into his pockets.

To them enter a couple more officers. The new-comers wear the light khaki uniform of the tropics and bear the badges of a famous Gurkha regiment.

"Evening, Major; sorry we couldn't get here before," the taller of the two remarks. "Had a rare job to find the house. One of your chaps at the end of the lane put us right, after trying to run me through with that beastly bayonet of his. Took us for German spies or something."

"Sorry, Johnston," the Major apologised, "but you won't get out of that nasty habit of creeping about at night. I don't wonder he tried to stick you. How are your 'children' to-night?" he added. "Pretty fit?"

"Fit!" said Johnston; then, with mock politeness, "the officers, N.C.O.'s and men of the Eenteenth Gurkhas return thanks for kind enquiries, and beg to state that despite the cold snap they are in the very best of health. Fit? They're simply sitting up on their hind legs and asking for it. I've never seen 'em like it. Seriously, Major," he went on, "if you haven't

fixed up a top-hole scheme for to-night I believe there'll be a mutiny."

The Major laughed again. "I think we shall be able to satisfy even your bloodthirsty 'little people' to-night," he said. "Look here——" and he pulled the map round.

Then followed a close recital of instructions with a short discussion afterwards. At 12.25 precisely the Major took his watch from the table and closed it with a snap.

"In twenty minutes, gentlemen," he said. Then, "Orderly! Where's that whisky that came to-day?"

The whisky was promptly forthcoming, and mugs were filled.

"Here's luck!" and the mugs clinked together over the table.

The Major shook hands all round and left the room. The remaining officers turned quickly to buckle on belts, revolvers and kit and followed him. Stewart remained for a moment to blow out the lamps.

Just before he puffs at the last one he pauses, glances over his shoulder and stealthily draws from his pocket a tiny morocco case.

"Wish me luck," he whispers, "it may be the last time."

And the fair young face within beams up at him, a world of loving thought in the deep hazel eyes.

With a little sigh and a little laugh he presses it to his lips. Puff! The last lamp is out. The door closes silently, and the room is empty save for the firelight shadows which flicker in mocking dance across the walls.

The second act is a short one, and the scene is the small *place* of the little village which the two battalions have made their rendezvous. The men are a little way out on a field. It has been a lovely autumnal day of brilliant sunshine succeeded by an evening of radiant moonlight so bright that it was possible to read a printed page. But fortunately for the venture, big clouds have crept up, and by midnight it is pitch dark. In a corner of the *place* the Major has grouped in front of him the officers and N.C.O.'s.

In a few brief sentences he sketches the plans for the attack. The objective is simple—three parallel trenches, with their communications, which lie between the ruins of a village on our right and a shattered farm-house on our left. There is to be no firing until the men have won the third trench (bombs had not then come into fashion with us). The Gurkhas take the left, the Scots the right of the line. The guns will be ready to stop enemy reinforcements upon a rocket signal: they have been cutting the wire entanglements during the day, but there is certain to be a fair amount left. Everything to be

done in dead silence. These and a few other necessary orders.

"Fall in now, please," concludes the Major, "and I will give you five minutes or so to tell your men. Good luck to you!"

Ten minutes quickly passed and the order was given to start. The men marched off, the Indian battalion leading, in perfect silence with broken step. A mile or so forward the Gurkhas turned off down a branch lane. Everything was timed to the minute. The Scots halted just short of the village which the Wessex had won that afternoon; the first-line enemy trench was 150 yards away on the far side The Gurkhas were to have the principal share in the attack, for they could work more silently; the Scots could hardly hope to reach the first trench unperceived even if all the wire was cut. If they attracted the enemy's fire it would not greatly matter, for the real attack was to come from the left.

And so to Act III. The Major is standing at the head of the column, watch in hand. Two minutes to the time and all well so far. There is no firing from the left, so the Indians must have got to their position without mishap, and that was perhaps the most important part of the work. The rest should be easy.

Again the watch is closed with a snap. "'A' Company," whispers the Major.

The Scots file through a big gap in the hedge and vanish like ghosts.

Now to follow the Indians.

A man from each of the six companies of the battalion has been chosen, and these six men draw lots for the post of honour. The six go forward, the lucky man leading. They are given five minutes' start, and the battalion follows by half companies as far as the ruined farmhouse. If you had been standing within ten yards of them you would not have heard a sound, and they have to clamber over a great pile of dead bodies and horses.

The Six creep on in single file so swiftly, so silently that they might have been some weird night-beetles. Each can just catch the faint glimmer of steel from the man in front. There has been left by accident a lucky gap in the wire about five yards wide; that gap has sealed the fate of the trench-dwellers.

The leader raises his arm and the others drop flat on the ground. He creeps forward two more yards and then lies still. A head with a flat-topped cap on it appears for a moment above the parapet and looks round. Evidently satisfied it gives a little yawn and disappears.

The Gurkha heaves himself over the parapet and drops like a cat into the trench. But one foot stumbles over an unseen German lying asleep at the bottom.

"Keep your feet out of my——" a guttural voice begins to mutter when the sentence is cut short by a little choking gasp. The *kukri* has taken its first victim that night.

The sentry, some seven paces away, turns at the sound. All is silent again. He leans back against the trench-wall, eyes half closed.

For thirty seconds the Gurkha stands motionless. Then he begins to steal along under the dark edge of the parapet. Five yards, four, three—a quick spring, a gleam of steel, and without a moan a second body lies at the bottom of the trench.

The Gurkha seizes the dead man's rifle, puts his cap on the bayonet, and waves it twice over the top. The faint hoot of an owl answers the signal. The Five drop quietly over the parapet with the first half company not far behind them.

Then the deadly work begins. The Indians are thirty yards along the trench before the first rifle-shot rings out. But by that time fully thirty Germans are lying in curious, huddled attitudes to show where they have passed. The surprise has been complete.

Now the second half of the company and the third are pouring over the lip of the trench. It is becoming a ghastly massacre, for the whole of the northern end of the first trench is won almost without a struggle.

Almost simultaneously with the first shot a

second is heard from the southern end where the Scottish battalion is attacking. There has been no attempt to kill the sentry, but the first line of the Scots, in open order, has got to within fifteen yards of the parapet, and there the wire has held them. It was the fling back of a cut strand which drew the sentry's fire. Snip, snip go the cutters, and the Scots begin to tear madly at the wire with bleeding fingers.

A wavering line of fire breaks out from the trench, but the Scots, with perfect discipline, carry on with their task. A star-light shoots into the air, hangs a second in a brilliant flare, and falls. A hoarse murmur and muffled shouting comes down the wind from the north.

"Aye, they'll be needing all the breath they've got the nicht," a Scot remarks grimly in an undertone.

The firing grows stronger, and some of the Scots are beginning to drop. The captain of this company takes a bullet in the shoulder as, bending low, he cuts swiftly at the wire. Now they have nearly got it underfoot. No possibility of further concealment, but the second line is close behind.

With two short whistle-blasts the captain calls to his men, and he is over the edge with a sergeant and three others close upon his heels. Crash goes his fist with the wire-cutters full in

the face of a stout German, and the man goes down as the officer tugs out his revolver.

Now the Scots are coming fast over the parapet. Many of the second line clear the trench and make straight for the communication. More stars gleam into the air, and a searchlight, away on the right, begins to fizz into a beam. It sweeps round and faintly reveals a swarm of dark forms to the north, where the Gurkhas climb across the space to the second-line trench.

At the junction of the trenches there is the maddest confusion. Where there is barely room for two men to pass each other the floor becomes blocked with bodies, friend and foe. Men clamber over each other, thrusting and tearing and stabbing. Some from the rear trenches run up the communications to support their comrades only to become jammed fast by others running back. And through it all Scottish bayonet and Gurkha *kukri* work steadily on until the trenches and cuttings become a horrible, dripping shambles.

Even now the enemy to the rear cannot grasp what is happening, for the firing seems to have died down. Only there grows that curious noise of stifled shouting and hissing.

At last an enemy battery opens fire and the shells plump down into the broken village and the Wessex lines well behind the attacking battalions. This should mean prompt retaliation from our

own guns, but the battery-commander guesses what is going on, and so he sits patiently waiting for the rocket signal. He has got his guns ready, carefully laid upon the area to the rear of that third trench, and the single word "Fire!" down the telephone will set his clockwork machinery in motion.

The Scots climbing into the second trench join hands with the Gurkhas, so perfect has been the timing of the attack and its execution; and the whole affair, since the first sentry was killed, has lasted eight or ten minutes—perhaps not so long.

The capture of the second line is not quite so simple a task, but it is quickly accomplished. For speed is everything now if they are to win the third. The attacking waves pour on, leaving supports to settle with the remaining defenders. The enemy guns have got some hint of the serious menace, and gradually drop the range, searching back.

Lieutenant Stewart, with the supports, had charge of the rocket signal, and now that the second line is passed he decides that the moment has come. Crouching into a corner of the trench he carefully places the rocket-stick, strikes a match, and lights the fuse. Is it odd that amid all this welter of killing his thoughts should fly back to that last evening at Henley Regatta, the hundred Chinese lanterns on punts and

houseboats mirrored in the dark, peaceful Thames; the glitter of fireworks over Temple Island? Four little months ago!

With a fizz and a splutter the rocket soars aloft and breaks into a shower of purple stars. Before the last glowing ball has broken the guns of the battery crash off in "two rounds gun fire," followed by the steady, regular concussions from "battery fire, five seconds." Telephone wires are being trailed out to the rear as the attack develops, and a gunner officer comes plodding along with his two operators trying hard to weather the storm of enemy fire.

Nothing heartens the infantry more than the knowledge that their own guns are backing them up, and the first burst of shrapnel one hundred yards in front of them brings a hearty cheer from the Scots.

"Yon's verra excellent practice, I'm thinking," said one of them breathlessly as he jabbed his bayonet home. "Just a wee bit mountain mist to damp the de'ils."

But the shout told the enemy at last what was up against them. There was no mistaking a Scottish cheer. And from the other flank there came such a series of blood-curdling yells as must have sounded to the panic-stricken Germans like a pack of fiends loosed from hell. The trench leaped into flame from rifles and machine-guns. But it was too late. The Scots and Gurkhas

hurled themselves straight for German throats, while behind the enemy the bursting shells told that more guns had come into play to cut off supports.

The third line trench was won, and the Scots set feverishly to work to consolidate their new position against the counter-attack which was certain to follow. But there we will leave them happily in possession, and hope for the best in the beating off of the attack which did indeed develop at dawn.

"Weel, Johnny," said a Scot to a black brother-in-arms, "ye'll have had a good nicht the noo!"

"Johnny" grinned broadly.

# XVI

## THE EVE OF ST. CRISPIN

*O now, who will behold*
*The royal captain of this ruin'd band*
*Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent!*
. . . . . .
*For forth he goes and visits all his host,*
*Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,*
*And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen.*
*Upon his royal face there is no note*
*How dread an army hath enrounded him.*

"To-MORROW is Saint Crispian!" Just five hundred years before, and almost upon this very ground, had Harry of England met and broken, in fair shock of battle, the chivalry of France.

"What is this castle call'd that stands hard by?" says Shakespeare's Henry.

"They call it Agincourt," replied the French herald.

> "Then call we this the field of Agincourt,
> Fought on the day of Crispin Crispianus."

On Crispin's Day, 1914, was England once again embattled against an enemy. Once again, with "lank-lean cheeks and war-worn coats," her sons faced overwhelming numbers. How would the issue fall?

The fighting all along the line had been gaining in intensity, and the Allies stood hard upon

the defensive. A week earlier the Seventh Division and the Third Cavalry Division had come down from Ostend and were thrown forward to hold the approaches to Ypres until the First Corps could come to their support. On October 21 Sir John French, realising the increasing numbers of the enemy and that the original plans for an advance could no longer hold good, pointed out to his Corps Commanders that the utmost to be done "was to maintain our present very extended front and to hold fast our positions until French reinforcements could arrive from the south." On October 25 the violence of the German attack began steadily to set towards a climax.

So on this Crispin's Eve it is not unfitting that we too turn our backs for a short spell upon the firing line and see how the rest of the host fares at this tremendous crisis of history.

Here, then, are the H.Q. of a Corps. They are housed in an imposing château standing in the midst of a beautiful park which marches with the ugly industrial land. It is a Corps which has had to bear some of the hardest knocks of the war, and during the last few days it has been fighting for its very existence. We stand barely out of earshot of the guns; and yet you might very reasonably doubt whether there is a war on at all.

Turn in at a door labelled "Signals." In

the hall are a couple of motor-bicycles being cleaned, and in some cane-bottomed chairs lounge three or four dispatch-riders scanning the pages of the *Tatler* and *Sketch*. A little farther on, through another door, you enter a room where a couple of officers lean over a big map covered with tiny flags and pinned to the dining-room table. Here you may find the position of every single unit in the corps, and from the clock on the mantelpiece you may take "Signals" time.

In the next room, obviously the salon of the house, are four typists clicking away at their machines. In one corner the A.Q.M.G. is giving some instructions to the O.C. of an ammunition park; in another a French officer is explaining something to the head of the A.G.'s department. You want to see the Provost-Marshal about some court-martial case? Certainly. Everyone is readily accessible if it is business, and as no one is there who is not on business you very quickly get through with your mission. I have no doubt the Commander-in-Chief would see you in a moment if you once dared to send your name in.

But the remarkable fact about it all is that there is never a suspicion of hurry or worry. You may see far more bustle in a solicitor's office in Birmingham. The only time I ever saw Corps H.Q. begin to get a little excited was on the day

when General von Kluck was captured, together with four of his staff.

What? Didn't you know we captured von Kluck? Oh, you ought to hear about that—it is really rather amusing.

It began (so far as I was concerned) when my "batman" called me in the early morning. Whenever my boots were dropped with a crash I knew something had happened: it was his method of drawing my attention to the fact that he was bursting with importance.

"Have you heard the news, sir?" he started. (Morgan was really a Welshman, but I never could reproduce Welsh.) I lay expectant.

"We've captured old von Kluck," said he triumphantly.

"What?" said I, really aroused this time. "One of our men?"

"Oh, no, sir. Some sentry out by Dicky-bush."

"Oh!" said I. "How did he do it?"

"Well, sir, the General was coming along in his big car with three other officers. He seems to have taken the wrong road and didn't know he was in our lines. He stopped to ask the sentry the way."

"Yes," I said, "go on." This was getting exciting.

"The sentry, sir, spotted at once they must be big bugs of Germans, pushed his bayonet in

at the window and yelled 'hands up' loud enough to fetch out the N.C.O. of the guard. So old von Kluck was taken proper."

We were getting used to rumours by this time so I was rather sceptical about this one. But, sitting down to breakfast, in burst our impressionable junior subaltern.

"I say, you chaps; heard about von Kluck?"

Yes, we had heard something.

"They've got him," said Tiny Tim (he was six foot tall), dancing round the room; "captured him by Wipers. Old Kluck and a whole brigade of foot-sloggers" (i.e. infantry).

Two hours later a battalion of the Warwicks came along.

"Morning, Simpson!" I hailed the Adjutant. "What's all this about von Kluck?"

"G'morning," replied Simpson. "Yes, it's quite true. One of our patrols rounded up the General and a brigade of the Prussian Guard."

This sounded genuine enough, though it seemed too good to be true. But Corps H.Q. would know. I had to call there in the afternoon, and it was at once obvious from the air of suppressed excitement that something had happened.

"Heard about von Kluck?" remarked a young Signal officer.

"I've heard something," said I. "What's happened?"

"It seems that he and an escort of about half a dozen troopers rode straight into one of our patrols. Our chaps charged and old Kluck got knocked off his horse. The cavalry chaps say they stood round him in a ring to listen to his language. He *must* have been sick." That was Signals' version and quite the most entertaining.

"I hear they've taken von Kluck prisoner," said I in tentative fashion to the D.A.Q.M.G.

"So they say," replied the D.A.Q.M.G. "I don't know much about it yet, as the news only came through this afternoon. I believe some sentry held him up in a motor-car with four of his staff."

That was Morgan's version, and it seemed the most likely.

The next day we heard that there wasn't a shred of truth in any one of the versions. Nor was it ever discovered how the rumour originated.

They say that the Clubs at home are hotbeds for rumours, but they cannot hold a candle to "the front." The number of times the Kaiser had been assassinated, or had been bombed by our airmen! And the number of times the Crown Prince had been buried! Each fresh occasion would add a little zest to life, and we lived in hope until the rumour was discredited.

It must have been about this time that Herr Lissauer, and the German public generally, pro-

vided the British Army in the Field with perhaps the greatest joke a British Army has ever known —"The Hymn of Hate" and "Gott strafe England." And when dear old *Punch* published the portraits of a German family, with dog and sausage attachment, indulging in its morning "hate" the whole Army rocked with laughter. German prisoners were invariably asked to "oblige" with the famous anthem, and if they did it nicely and snarled properly over the "hate" part of it, they were suitably rewarded with cigarettes. Yes, at least we owe Germany our gratitude for initiating that "Hate" campaign, for humour was a very precious thing in those days of stress.

Apropos of German prisoners (of whom, naturally enough, we did not take a very large number at that period), it is interesting to notice that in two characteristics at least they were similar to prisoners taken two and a half years later. At a time when the British were fighting for their lives against vastly superior numbers both of men and guns, the Germans captured were generally either raw recruits or middle-aged men. They always used to hint broadly that the German moral was getting badly broken; that they were half-starved and sick of the war; that they recognised the hopelessness of their massed attacks; that the leadership by their regimental officers was bad; that the English gunnery was

devilish and that their losses were terrible. These and other like facts. Of course, these yarns, with copies of captured letters and diaries, were faithfully reproduced in our home Press, and must, too, have had a certain deceiving effect upon our Intelligence Department. They certainly heartened our own men.

But if you compare these features with the condition of prisoners taken during the Allied offensive in 1917 you will find that they are almost identical. The moral is obvious. Then, as at any time during the succeeding three years, the enemy constantly created the impression that they were coming to the end of their man-power. They would put into the line recruits of eight weeks' training, or men drawn from their last reserves. One incident will illustrate this.

A certain eminent K.C., whose name at the outbreak of war was a household word (we will call him Robinson), was given a job on the lines of communication. A party of 100 German prisoners was brought down under a very small escort, and Robinson offered to take charge.

Taking over, he was marching the men along when a voice from the crowd hailed him by name. Robinson took no notice, and the voice hailed him again. Finally he turned towards the speaker, whom he seemed vaguely to remember.

"Yes," said Robinson, "what's the matter?"

"Don't you remember me?" asked the German.

"I'm sorry. I can't say I do," replied Robinson.

"Surely you remember last June the case of —— *v.* —— in the High Court?" And the German named a *cause célèbre* between two big firms which had once aroused much interest.

"I was the defendant," added the German, "and you were my counsel."

"Of course," said Robinson. "But what on earth are you doing here?"

The German, who was actually a leading Berlin banker, then told how he had returned to Berlin towards the end of July and had gone on with his ordinary business.

"Three days ago," said he, "I was at home with my wife when I received an order to join the next draft to my regiment. They gave me two hours' notice. We were sent straight up to the front line, and—well, here I am, and jolly glad too."

In face of incidents like that it is hardly to be wondered that our people imagined that Germany was feeling her losses. What would German G.H.Q. have thought had they taken prisoner a well-known London man who, four days before, was sitting in the manager's chair of the City branch of the London and Westminster Bank?

One is happy to pay tribute whenever possible to the courage in battle even of an enemy like Germany, and it should be recorded that those youngsters of 18 and 19 advanced to the attack almost always with the disciplined courage of veterans. There was at least one occasion when a company or more of those lads—part of an officers' training corps, I believe—attacked one of our trenches with such gallantry and élan that they thoroughly broke our defence and captured the trench.

And here is another interesting fact which arouses many conflicting thoughts. Over and over again half-written letters to their home folks have been found on German and Austrian soldiers, officers and men, couched in such terms as an educated Frenchman or Englishman might have used from the battlefield—and indeed often has used. Expressions about "fighting for the cause of liberty," "freeing the world from the oppressor," and so on.

"Do not grieve for me should I die," wrote one boy to his mother, "but rather be proud that I have fallen in so glorious a cause, to protect you and Bertha and to help free our Fatherland from the terror of the invader."

It is difficult to reconcile such thoughts with the knowledge that from childhood German men and women have been taught to believe in the omnipotence of Germany as the future Over-

Lord of the nations : that any means to that end are legitimate.

"We are indubitably the most martial nation in the world," wrote a well-known German author in 1897.[1] "We are the most gifted of nations in all the domains of science and art. We are the best colonists, the best sailors, and even the best traders. And yet we have not up to now secured our due share in the heritage of the world. . . . That the German Empire is not the end but the beginning of our national development is an obvious truth."

But a digression on the subject hardly falls within the scheme of this volume, so we will not pursue it. One may, however, suggest that when Germany prates about the war being one of pure defence for her she probably desires to convey that *any* war for her would be defensive. For Germany asserts that she is ringed round by enemies, and, confident that her country will be attacked, that it is quite legitimate that she should get in the first blow. But then, all Germany's statements form such a maze of lies and contradictions that one really cannot bother about them.

There are so many features of interest "at the back of the front" that it is rather difficult to decide at which to pause. Many of these

[1] *Die Weltstellung des Deutschtums*, by Fritz Bley.

features have long since become familiar to the people at home through books and pictures, but at that time they were all novelties to us out there and a constant source of surprise and, one may add, generally of gratification.

There were, for instance, the hot baths and "wash and brush up" arrangements for men coming out of the trenches. Very primitive they were at first, but the system was quickly improved and extended. Then there were the weird goat-skins by way of winter coats. The smell was somewhat penetrating, but they were very useful, and the men came to regard it as a kind of fancy-dress ball. Amateur George Robeys appeared in every unit, and you constantly met a counterpart of that mirth-provoker waving a great club and performing the "Prehistoric Man" act, wherein He of the Knotted-Knees breaks bread with She of the Auburn Locks and is slain for his temerity by He of the Fearsome Face.

The motto which G.H.Q. set themselves to follow was this. "If a unit wants anything, and money can buy it and transport can bring it, then it shall be procured." And this actually meant *anything*, whether war-gear or articles for increased comfort. I do not say that these things were procured at once, for that was well-nigh impossible. You at home will recall the stress of that first winter when the home organ-

isation must have been topsy-turvy. But G.H.Q. recognised the need of doing every imaginable thing which could contribute to the health and well-being of the men, and set to work with that end in view.

Others more worthily have paid tribute to this work of the Commander-in-Chief and his Quarter-Master-General, but if "twenty years a soldier" may add his little tribute I can only say that the care and solicitude evinced by them, and the apparent miracles which they wrought, seemed to the old stagers like some wonderful dream. It was a ghastly winter that first one at the front, but the men stuck it in the knowledge that everything that could be done for their comfort was being done.

And generous friends at home can never, never guess what their loving parcels of comforts meant to officers and men. A little tin of chocolate or peppermints, with half a dozen penny packets of cigarettes, *and* a tiny note enclosed—you were at once a king among men.

Upon one occasion only did I hear an expression of doubtful gratitude from the recipient of a parcel. And as it was the only occasion you shall hear how it came about, for there is a little moral attached.

Private Smithson rejoiced in the gift of two pairs of beautiful thick, soft, woolly socks. They formed part of a parcel from some un-

known lady, and had been distributed by the C.O. There was just time to put on a pair before parade. From parade the battalion went off on a route march by way of exercise.

Before a quarter of a mile had been covered Smithson felt something irritating and uncomfortable in his boot. As the march went on his discomfort increased and his foot began to throb and ache. But he stuck to it like a Trojan.

At last, after several hours, Smithson got back to billets. He tore off his boot. No, it was the sock. Off came the sock, revealing a great blister on his toe. In the sock was something hard. He put his hand in and drew out a piece of crumpled paper. Smoothing it out he read the words, "With love from Amy."

You'll remember, Amy, next time to pin your little message outside, won't you? Then it will be all right.

The question of recreation for the men in the form of entertainments, games and such like had hardly then been seriously considered. A little later the subject was recognised as being of the very first importance. In every way possible the men must be relieved from the terrific strain when not actually in the firing-line; their spirits must be kept up and so their health maintained.

In an earlier chapter mention was made of

Captain Eldridge and his little concert at the Marne. During the winter this officer was most energetic in giving these entertainments whenever chance offered, and since he was the pioneer and most popular with the men, any record of this feature of life "at the front" would be incomplete without some mention of his work. Here is an extract from one of his letters which appeared in the *Times:*

"Last Saturday I had a specially large and attentive audience for my weekly *causerie* to the men. I had only a smallish barn available, and about 60 or 70 men could not get anywhere near. I gave, first, a general synopsis of events by land and sea, with some account of the Russian army, the difference in temperament, etc., between their men and the enemy. Then a couple of *Punch* articles, which were much enjoyed; lastly, an attempted forecast of the future, the spirit of youth, and of the nation, and wound up by reciting the 'St. Crispin' speech from *Henry V.* I give another chat tonight—probably the last possible for some little time. I hope to give some recitals of Dickens's 'Christmas Carol' just before Christmas—if the enemy will graciously permit."

It may be added that Eldridge was able to give a few recitals of the "Carol" that Christmas, and that they were very deeply appreciated.

Apropos of concerts and music, a word on "Tipperary" is not out of place. One is always loth to destroy a popular superstition, but that now world-famous tune was not nearly so much sung in France in those early days as people seem to imagine. Personally, it was not until the middle of December that I heard the song at all, and for the first time. Of course, it was sung a good deal, but so were several others, and there was not much to choose between them in popularity, although "Tipperary" was undoubtedly the best tune.

But since then, mainly through popular sentiment, "Tipperary" came to be recognised as *the* marching song of the "Contemptibles." It never was that, but it has become something else. It seems now almost on a par with the National Anthems of the Allies. For it is often sung at the end of a concert with "God Save the King," and very frequently the men rise to their feet for the singing of it. Several times I have seen it noted in the Press that "Tipperary" is dead. That is incorrect. It has become canonised, if one may use the term, by reason of its association with the men of the Old Army, and so is sung on special occasions only.

At that time I do not think that the activities of the Y.M.C.A. had yet reached "the front."

I seem to remember the first of their tents or huts arriving about the end of December. Where a volume might well be devoted to praise of this organisation's work it is impossible to convey in a few lines how inestimable a boon to the men this work has been. One may say, I think, that the Y.M.C.A. has proved itself to be one of the most valuable allies a British Army in the Field has ever had.

For many years I have seen something of the activities of the Y.M.C.A. in all parts of the world, but it is the war which has brought the Society to the fulfilment of the best ideals. In September, 1914, the Y.M.C.A. found itself. At the beginning there was more than a hint of the missionary and text element, but this was speedily cut out, and the men soon came to realise that here indeed was a splendid friend. All welcome and no questions asked! A social club with unlimited membership, no entrance fee nor subscription, and with premises wherever they are wanted. The only visitors to whom the Y.M.C.A. very regretfully cannot refuse admittance are German shells. Here's wishing them (the Y.M.C.A., not the shells) all the best!

And what of the officers? They needed recreation if anyone did, and there was very little for them outside an occasional game of soccer

with the men. As a matter of fact, officers are never off duty; at least, they never were during the first winter. But when you have British troops on active service you may be certain that the officers will find something in the way of sport. Did not the Iron Duke have a pack of hounds with him out in Spain? An admirable precedent!

Some cheery souls went out partridge shooting near Hazebrouck. Birds were fairly plentiful and a good many brace found their way to officers' messes. But more than one officer complained that it was rather dull when he couldn't hear the report of his own gun owing to the heavy firing going on.

By the way, it is curious how little affected is bird life in and about the front lines. One would have imagined the little creatures scared to death by the detonations. And yet, in the spring and early summer, infantry advancing over "No man's land" or through woods would often disturb nesting birds. Or perhaps from beneath their very feet a skylark would soar aloft carolling her eternal song of hope.

In a singularly beautiful poem called "The Rainbow" one of our soldier poets[1] has recorded

[1] Leslie Coulson, a sergeant in the 2nd London Regt. Royal Fusiliers. He was killed in action at Lesbœufs, October, 1916. A sweet and gentle spirit, totally unfitted for war, but a man whose lion-hearted courage and pride of race carried him through. A little volume of his poems is published by Erskine Macdonald.

an impression of this. I venture to reproduce the stanza :

"From death that hurtles by
I crouch in the trench day-long,
But up to a cloudless sky
From the ground where our dead men lie
A brown lark soars in song.
Through the tortured air,
Rent by the shrapnel's flare,
Over the troubleless dead he carols his fill,
And I thank the gods that the birds are beautiful still."

To return to the officers and recreation. There was one famous occasion (this was in 1915) when a big field turned out for a cross-country paper-chase after the Kaiser. At least it wasn't really the Kaiser, but an officer made up and dressed to look like him. It was a great day when veteran general officers and junior subalterns, mounted on all sorts and conditions of hacks and hunters, careered in mad pursuit after the All-Highest. The "War Lord" laughed so much that he rolled off his horse and so was captured; but the chase had been long and stern before that auspicious ending had been reached.

But it was the Seventh Division which hit upon the most exciting and the most productive kind of sport. This was in Belgium on their way down to Ypres.

A certain number of armoured motor-cars were available, and parties were made up to go

Hun hunting. A "book" would invariably be made upon the possibilities of the day's "bag," and the parties would sally forth armed to the teeth in these forerunners of the famous "Tanks." Different routes were selected, and the cars were headed straight for the German lines. The game usually consisted of adventurous Uhlans, cavalry patrols on outlying pickets, and it was a very poor day when the cars would not return with German helmets, lances and rifles dangling all over them like scalps to a Red Indian's girdle. The Belgians also were particularly clever at the sport.

There are so many other features behind the lines about which it would be pleasant to chat. But there is sterner work in hand and we must hasten to it. You should, then, picture the British troops on this Eve of St. Crispian troubling but little about the so dread army which would enround them. They are weary, very weary, but calm and confident. There is little or no hint at the various H.Q.'s of the stress of the fighting, and the services of organisation are working admirably in keeping up the supply of food, clothing and ammunition.

But the storm hour by hour grows in intensity, and the line of khaki is being worn very thin. And even the Commander-in-Chief, hardened though he is, looks towards the south and hopes French relief may not be too late.

# The Roll

OF

# THE THIRD CAVALRY AND SEVENTH INFANTRY DIVISIONS

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*General Officer Commanding*—MAJOR-GENERAL SIR H. RAWLINSON.

## THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION

*General Officer Commanding*—MAJOR-GENERAL THE HON. JULIAN BYNG.

### 6th Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—BRIGADIER-GENERAL E. MAKINS.

3rd Dragoon Guards *
1st Dragoons (The Royals)
10th Hussars

### 7th Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. T. McM. KAVANAGH.

1st Life Guards
2nd Life Guards
Royal Horse Guards (The Blues)

ROYAL HORSE ARTILLERY
Batteries "C" and "K"

ROYAL ENGINEERS
3rd Field Squadron

## SEVENTH INFANTRY DIVISION

*General Officer Commanding*—MAJOR-GENERAL T. CAPPER.

### 20th Infantry Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—BRIGADIER-GENERAL H. G. RUGGLES-BRISE.

1st Batt. Grenadier Guards
2nd Batt. the Border Regt.
2nd Batt. Scots Guards
2nd Batt. Gordon Highlanders

### 21st Infantry Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—BRIGADIER-GENERAL H. E. WATTS.

2nd Batt. Bedfordshire Regt.
2nd Batt. Royal Scots Fusiliers
2nd Batt. Yorkshire Regt.
2nd Batt. Wiltshire Regt.

### 22nd Infantry Brigade

*Brigade Commander*—BRIGADIER-GENERAL S. T. B. LAWFORD.

2nd Batt. The Queen's
1st Batt. R. Welsh Fusiliers
2nd Batt. Warwickshire Regt.
1st Batt. South Staffordshire Regt

CAVALRY (attached)
The Northumberland Yeomanry (Hussars)

ROYAL ARTILLERY

*R.H.A.*—Batteries "F" and "T."

*R.F.A.*—Batteries 104, 105, 106 (XXII. Brigade), 12, 35, 58 (XXXV. Brigade).

*R.G.A.*—Heavy Batteries 111, 112.

ROYAL ENGINEERS
54th and 55th Field Companies.

* Joined Division early in November.

# XVII

## THE HOLDING OF THE GATE

WEST. *O that we now had here*
*But one ten thousand of those men in England*
*That do no work to-day!*
K. HEN. *What's he that wishes so?*
*My cousin Westmoreland?—No, my fair cousin:*
*If we are mark'd to die, we are enow*
*To do our country loss; and if to live,*
*The fewer men the greater share of honour.*

IT has been said that no single Infantry Division of the British Army has ever been composed of a more splendid fighting personnel than was the Seventh when it landed in Belgium.

For the benefit of the uninitiated I may here explain that when a British battalion of the Line is mobilised from its Peace footing to War strength a considerable number of Reservists are recalled to the Colours to make it up to that strength. For certain reasons, partly because the battalions had been drawn from duty abroad, it was necessary or it was difficult to add these Reservists to the strength of the Seventh Division. Thus the Division took the field with comparatively few additions to its ordinary strength.

To emphasise the importance of this (although there was possibly a slight diminution from full War strength) I cannot do better than quote a remark once made to me by a distinguished military authority.

"The average British Line Regiment (or Battalion)," he said, "has, on its Peace establishment, no superior in the world as a fighting force. When you add its Reserve and bring it to War strength you detract perhaps 25 per cent. or more from its value."

It may, perhaps, be compared to a crack polo team. The players, both individually and in combination, work up to a fine point of perfection, and any alteration in the team by putting in another man as a substitute is bound to affect that combination. The analogy is not very sound, but it may suggest the meaning of that remark.

If, then, we accept this dictum—and the facts certainly upheld it in this case—it is a little easier to understand how it came about that this Division should have added so imperishable a lustre to British Arms.

The 7th Infantry Division and the 3rd Cavalry Division landed in Belgium on October 7. On the previous day the Belgian Army had begun to withdraw from Antwerp, and with it was that Naval Division of ours which had been hurriedly equipped and sent over to try to save

the city. On October 9 Antwerp lay open to the Germans. It became the task of the Division to act as rearguard and cover the retirement of the Belgians.

Once again, then, just as at Mons, a British force disembarked, and within three or four days found itself involved in a general retirement before overwhelming numbers. At Mons the British had to go because the French did; at Antwerp they had to save the Belgians.

The first three or four days of such conditions are always difficult for the men; they have to get acclimatised, as it were. So at the very beginning discipline was put to the test by continuous marching and counter-marching, for which the men could see no object. Backwards and forwards they went between Bruges and Ostend, and the pavé roads caused considerable suffering. No one really knew what was happening, and, naturally enough, there was a certain amount of "grousing."

The confusion after Mons was sufficiently trying, but it was nothing to the chaos which reigned after the fall of Antwerp. If you can picture Liverpool suddenly abandoned of all its great population, the people crowding into the shipping in the harbour or streaming out across the countryside with such few possessions as they could carry; if you then mingle with these folk a tired, battered Belgian Army of all arms, you

will get some idea of the scenes which the 7th Division witnessed. Upon less seasoned troops the effect might well have been dispiriting.

The Belgians gave our men that generous welcome which we have come to know so well, and heaped such little gifts upon them as they could. There were the usual amusing comments from the bystanders as the troops swung down the roads. The Gordon Highlanders, for instance, were seriously pointed out as "the wives of the English soldiers," and the wrath of the Jocks when they heard it was well worth seeing —from a respectful distance.

With the fall of Antwerp and the retirement of the Belgian Army through Ghent towards the coast the orders for the 7th Division were to conform to the movements of the 3rd Corps, which was to the south of Ypres. At this time there was hardly any idea that the enemy were developing an attack upon that city.

The seven days which elapsed between the landing and the arrival at Ypres were most exhausting ones. There was not a great deal of fighting, but it was sufficient to react upon the nerves of men who were marching night and day without proper rest. In fact, towards the end of the week the infantry were in much the same condition as their comrades had been after Le Cateau in August.[1] And oh, those pavé roads!

[1] "The Retreat from Mons," p. 181 *et seq.*

If you look at the map (p. 194) you will see a little town called Menin about 12 miles east of Ypres. This formed a useful tactical point for the enemy, and Sir John French decided that a big effort should be made to occupy it. The 7th Division and Cavalry were accordingly ordered to advance through Ypres and make the attempt upon the morning of the 18th October.

Extending out into a line of some twenty miles or more, which ran in a curve from Langemarck on the north to Zandvoorde on the south, the infantry and cavalry advanced straight towards an enemy some seven times their own strength.

The Cavalry pushed ahead out on the left flank, and soon after 9.0 a.m. their outposts encountered the first skirmishing patrols of the enemy. As usual our men took the initiative and charged home. But this time the odds were too heavy, even with our main bodies coming up in support, and the order was given to retire.

In those days there was still something left of the glamour of War; still a little of the pomp and circumstance remaining to the mounted troops. And in all mounted work I doubt whether there is any movement which is more thrilling, more inspiring, than when a Horse Battery comes into action in the open. Most people, I suppose, would give the palm to a pukka cavalry charge, with men and horses going

"all out." And certainly such a charge must always swing the excitement of the onlooker up to fever heat. But ask a cavalry man what he thinks about the work of a Horse Gunner Troop on an occasion like that of Moorslede or Ledeghem on this morning of October 18.

You picture the Cavalry gradually falling back fighting a series of little rearguard actions against ever-increasing numbers of enemy cavalry. You see here a troop dismounted lining a hedgerow, there a squadron dashing out from cover of some farm buildings to cut off a too adventurous enemy patrol. Always retiring but contesting, and with fine effect, every yard of the ground.[1]

It was "K" Battery which helped to hold the ground near Moorslede, and "C" Battery which helped the 6th Cavalry Brigade to capture Ledeghem. As the designating letters have already been given we will allow them to stand here, otherwise one purposely refrains, so far as possible, from distinguishing units where all did such wonderful work.

The Battery was not so spick and span in appearance as it had been ten days before. The

[1] "Considering the amount of opposition encountered against largely superior numbers," so wrote the G.O.C. of the 3rd Cavalry Division, "our casualties were small, whilst there is no doubt that the enemy suffered very severely at our hands. This smallness was largely due to the skilful manner in which each Brigade was withdrawn."

mud and rain of Flanders do not tend to improve the look of steel and leatherwork, nor were the horses any the better for the ceaseless trekking about the country. But the rust remained on the surface (if you take my meaning); it certainly had not penetrated into the machinery.

From an early hour that morning the Battery had been manœuvring over the very unpleasant countryside, and as breakfast had been a very trivial meal no one was in the best of tempers. Now there was a brief halt under cover, with the men dismounted, while the Battery Commander was out half a mile ahead discussing details with the Officer Commanding the Brigade.

Events move very swiftly where Cavalry are concerned, and the Brigade Commander, with a map spread out across his knees, had barely indicated the spot whence the latest report had reached him when one of his staff cantered up.

"They're pushing us back rather fast, sir," he said, "and there's only Captain ———'s squadron on the line by Zeeden farm."

The Brigade Commander made a rapid calculation and gave a curt order to the Staff Officer. Then, turning to the Battery Commander:

"We shall want you in a few minutes, Cranshawe," he said. "There's your direction, will you select your position, please?"

"Right, sir." The Battery Commander

saluted, waved a signal to his Sergeant-Major and horse-holder and galloped off.

There is nothing in military tactics which calls for swifter and surer decision than the manœuvre and "action" of a Horse Battery. (Don't forget that a Horse Battery is really a Cavalry unit.) In this respect it is not unlike the work of a T.B.D. commander in a "general action" at sea.

The Battery Commander took a rapid survey of the line of enemy approach, noted the points where his own cavalry were ready to work in support and attack, and quickly made up his mind on the best position for his guns. The Sergeant-Major had by this time got back to the Battery and reported to the Officer left in command.

"Get mounted!" the command rang out.

The men heaved themselves into their saddles, and the Nos. 1 moved sharply round their teams and vehicles to see that all was in order. The officer acting as Battery leader cantered ahead towards the Major.

"All right, Matheson, I'll take the Battery," said the Major, without lowering his field-glasses. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir. Battery column, head towards the road," replied the subaltern.

"Right. You can get back," said the Major. "We're going to support ——'s squad-

ron directly they quit that farm," he added, indicating some scattered buildings about three-quarters of a mile away.

With a salute the subaltern wheeled his horse and started back. For another couple of minutes the Major remained, carefully noting the movements of the enemy cavalry concentrating towards the farm. Then a glance toward his battery, and a swift calculation how many minutes it would take to bring it into action; then another look at the farm, and, slipping his glasses back into the case, he was off after his subaltern.

A couple of signals and the Battery was on the move at the trot. Another, and the head of the column changed direction. As it did so there came just that little touch of comedy which often means so much to men in the field; something to spin the current of thought into another direction.

Alongside the battery came racing one of the farm dogs with a great piece of meat in his jaws; close at his heels snapped a friend of his, and labouring heavily behind there floundered an old woman brandishing a pitchfork and screaming out horrid oaths.

It was the merest trifle of comedy, but the contrast between that episode and the stern business in hand was certainly very ludicrous. It sent the spirits of the men up a hundred per cent.

Now the Battery Commander has his battery moving fast, exactly parallel to the position he is going to take up, and happily sheltered from enemy observation by a slight rise in the ground. A couple more signals and the sections swing into line at the canter.

Into line they swing, intervals and alignment as perfect as at a review in the Long Valley. Away up the incline and the canter is really a gallop. Bump, crash, bump over the ragged ground thunder the guns. No whip to the teams—*they* know well what is expected of them —but here and there a tap on the shoulder of the off horse to steady him and keep the direction exact.

Up the rise they thunder. Now they are at the top, the level. Perfect line, perfect intervals as always, yet every team is stretched out in mad career. How will they ever pull up! you exclaim. Steady! steady all! Watch the Battery Commander galloping ahead.

He has timed the movement to a quarter of a minute. The enemy cavalry converging is close upon the farm which our squadron (what is left of it) is holding. Over his left shoulder he catches just a glimpse of a relieving troop or so of ours already on the move.

Steady! All eyes on the Battery Commander. Ah! there it is. Just the little tightening of the bit rein, the least check of the

gallop. Almost imperceptible, but every man has noted it.

Just three seconds later. A short, shrill whistle : arm straight above head : arm straight down to ground.

Halt! Action front!

A matter of seconds again, and every man (save the drivers) is off his horse. There is no "halt" : it seems, indeed, no more than a check of the pace. Yet every man is down. The Battery Commander has in some miraculous way got to the flank of the battery. The gun-trails are somehow got clear of the limbers. Away to the rear race the gun-teams, round swing the guns, and the first two ranging shells are bursting this side and that of the German cavalry before ever you have counted to twenty.

The orders for the Cavalry Division on that morning of the 18th were to cover the left flank of the 7th Division in its projected attack against Menin. The enemy strength was too great, and thus both infantry and cavalry were thrown upon the defensive. It was a repetition of what was happening to the Second Corps down by La Bassée.

On the 19th the First Corps had finished detraining at St. Omer and was being brought forward as rapidly as possible. But in the meantime the 7th Division and the Cavalry had to hold

the ground. On the 21st these two Divisions found themselves facing an overwhelming attack.

Before Sir Douglas Haig's Corps comes up let me suggest very briefly the conditions under which the 7th Division was working.

First of all, remember it was a new Division which did not possess the experience won from the Aisne defences: they did not yet know the paralysing effect of the German artillery nor what German massed infantry attacks were like.

It was open country, almost entirely flat, but broken by odd houses, hamlets and woods. The "gate" to be held had no natural advantages to help the defenders. The entrenchments were of the most hurried character, shallow gutters cut in the soil and the earth banked up.

In guns as in men our artillery was hopelessly outclassed, not indeed in personnel, but in numbers and weight of metal. You will have noted from the Roll on page 256 that the Division had not a single 4.5 (howitzer) battery. Nor was there any H.E. shell.

And of that little Force a full third was not infantry but cavalry; men who in training have nothing to do with trench work. And such trench work! But at Ypres they were all in the line, every man of them: 1st and 2nd Life Guards, the Royal Horse Guards (the Blues)—how often have you seen them as Sovereign's Escort clattering down Whitehall, watched the

Guard changed at 11 o'clock? Fine stay-at-home soldiers you thought them, perhaps; and yet on the Regimental Colour you will find emblazoned "Dettingen," "Waterloo," "Peninsula," "Tel-el-Kebir." Yes, they were all there in those blood-soaked trenches round Ypres, holding grimly on with their comrades of the Foot Guards. With them, too, fought the Northumberland Yeomanry, the first Territorial regiment to go into action; and those two Batteries of the Horse Gunners.

Such was the line. What was it?—one man to every seven yards? It cannot have been more. And in places where there was no difference between front and rear each alternate man had to face about to fire. Supports and reserves there were none.

"Hold on for all you are worth!" came the message from Sir John French when they turned at bay. "Hold on!"

They held on.

Upon the arrival of the First Corps there rested with Sir John French a grave decision. Should he strengthen his long thin line already wellnigh breaking, or should he try to stem the new German advance which was developing to the north of the 7th Division?

With fine courage he made his decision and sent the First Corps to prolong the line to the

north; to share equally with their comrades of the 7th Division the undying glory of that tremendous struggle against and victory over such mighty odds—odds of perhaps six or seven to one.

How can one tell the tale! A little impression sketched in with wavering lines is all that one may expect to give. And yet one dares to hope that even so crude a picture may contain elements to stir the blood and awaken a passionate gratitude to the men who stood for England's bulwark through those drear October days and nights.

It seemed that the men might almost as well have been lying in the open for all the cover the trenches afforded. It was the deadly German gunnery with the H.E. shell which worked the havoc. To describe it is impossible. Hour after hour and day after day without a pause the shells poured down with perfect accuracy, straight into the trenches, in front of them and behind them. On the first day one battalion of the 7th alone lost 10 officers and 200 men. How a single man of it remained alive is a mystery. And so exhausted were officers and men at the very beginning of that awful period that some would sleep through the hideous din as calmly as though they were at home. To awaken and grasp once again with almost nerveless fingers the rifle which still lay against the shoulder, or to pass unconsciously into the last quiet sleep of all.

"Hold on!" And something of a cheer ran down the line as the message was passed. Men glanced hopefully over their shoulders; then with a little sigh turned once more to their work.

Again and again the Germans broke into the defence. Sometimes they would capture a trench; often they would hesitate on the very edge and fall back.

On the 24th (one takes incidents at random) the Wiltshires were cut off and surrounded. For three hours and more they went on fighting. Some were captured, many more fell where they stood. Ringed round, ammunition nearly gone, they charged into the enemy and back again with bayonet and clubbed rifle. And almost at their last gasp a handful of the Worcesters and Highland Light Infantry got to them and cut them out.

Another Homeric fight was that of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Like the other battalions, they had gone into action more than 1,000 strong, and, with them, the numbers had gradually ebbed lower and lower. The end came when this remnant too was cut off. Message after message was sent to them to retire, but the message never arrived. No relief was near; nothing could be done for them. They just fought on and died. A fight to the finish. And when at last the enemy wave curled sullenly back and

the battalion roll was called, seventy men and a Second Lieutenant answered to their names.

Now and again the German gunners lifted their range a trifle, and hard behind the shells came a blue-grey mass of infantry. Steadily as on parade they advanced shoulder to shoulder, rank upon rank. Then once more British musketry would take its toll and German dead would pile up before the trench which might be reached but not won.

In front of one County battalion ran a cutting considerably wider than the average trench and some hundred yards long. Time after time the German infantry advanced over this until soon the cutting was filled level to the ground with dead, so that the enemy could march straight over their fallen comrades.

There was a subaltern of the Scots Fusiliers who was told off to stop a flank attack. He took twenty men and posted them at intervals through a wood. With this he suddenly discovered that he was quite close to a couple of German machine-guns. So he took his rifle and, ensconcing himself behind a tree, set to work upon the gun detachments. In a minute or so he had picked off every man. More men were sent up, and these, too, he picked off. And so it went on until the officer, firing 150 rounds, had shot no fewer than 70 Germans. I believe this subaltern received the D.S.O. for his exploit.

But all this time, if the German losses were heavy, our own casualties were mounting up. Hardly one of the original trenches remained, and the men took what shelter they could in the great holes dug by the German shells. Steadily, as the hours passed, were our numbers brought lower and lower; and still the little remnant stuck to it.

Here is a battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers; 1,000 odd strong they went into action. Within three days they had lost 24 officers and over 700 men. And still they fought on and held the line. And so it was with nearly every unit.

"Hold on like hell!" Again and again came the message. But the hours passed and exhausted troops ceased to care what happened. It became a joke—a grim, ghastly joke.

And yet General Joffre to the south was working hard for his Allies. On the 24th, so he had told our Commander-in-Chief, the 9th French Corps would be thrown into the fight to the north of Sir Douglas Haig's command. And true to promise the French arrived. But that was to the north, and the British had still to bear the brunt of the offensive upon Ypres.

Once again one must needs record with regret the methods of the Hun soldiery. Ask the Worcesters if they recall that day when they

came across some score of our wounded lying on the ground all with their throats cut. Ask the Royal Fusiliers if they remember retaking a certain trench and finding in it another score of our lads who had been wounded and who also had had their throats cut through. Ask other battalions if they remember October 29 and a certain German attack, when the Huns advanced, stabbing with the bayonet our wounded men as they lay before them on the ground. Oh, yes, the Germans are courageous enough with the bayonet at moments like that!

A small patrol of ours went out one day. They did their job, and, incidentally, took one German prisoner.

"Hallo!" said the company officer on their return; "did you only get one Boche?"

"Yes, sir," said the N.C.O.; "and we had the very devil of a job to get *him* past the Blankshires."

The Blankshires, you see, are another regiment which will remember.

Down on the right flank the enemy have burst through. Supports? There is some cavalry of ours up on the left flank. That is all that can be done. So the Cavalry Brigades trek down south from their hard-held position to throw themselves into the gap. And ever the ranks are thinned, while the casualty clearing stations in Ypres and the villages near, where the

R.A.M.C. work, splashed with blood from head to foot, look like horrible slaughter-houses.

How supplies of food and ammunition were got up to the firing line one cannot tell, for night brought no respite from the pitiless hail of shell. It was a drink of water when you could get it, and some chocolate and biscuit if you were lucky.

But the line still held.

It is well that stories of individual deeds of gallantry should be recorded when possible that they may serve for an inspiration to the men who come after, although where every man wrought so famously one hesitates to mention names. Yet no one, I think, will grudge a "mention" to E. J. Kennedy, a padre who was army chaplain to the 20th Brigade of the 7th Division. The Bishop of Winchester has spoken of him as "simple, manly, open-hearted towards man and devout towards God. His commanding stature and fine physical manhood gave him advantages which his fine character and genial nature used, by God's grace, to the best effect." He was universally loved, and died in harness a year later through overstrain of war work.

The situation near Zandvoorde, where the cavalry were, became one day more critical than ever. Kennedy had just reached the village and was eating some breakfast when the O.C. the brigade came along.

"Hallo, padre, good morning! The very man I want if you will help us," said the C.O.

"Yes," said Kennedy. "What is it?"

"We're in an awful hole out there," the C.O. went on, "and the Germans may break through at any moment. We must let Divisional H.Q. know how things are and so divert the ambulances coming out from Ypres. The wires are all cut. Will you volunteer? It's a risky job, but I've no one else to send."

"Write your message," said Kennedy, "and give me a minute or two to get these big boots off or I shall get hooked up in the stirrups."

Kennedy dived into his pack and sat down on a doorstep to change. A shell dropped in the street seven yards away, burst, and spattered the doorway with shrapnel bullets. By a miracle Kennedy was untouched.

"If that's a specimen I'm in for a lively time," laughed Kennedy as he swung into the saddle. A grip of the hand and he was off.

The road lay over the now famous Hill 60. Three miles of it, and under heavy fire nearly all the way. Kennedy bent low to the pommel and galloped. Shells were falling in every direction, but his splendid animal carried him along gamely, heedless of the bursts save for a momentary quiver of the flanks.

On they galloped through the storm—one mile—two miles—and the nerve-racking ordeal

began to tell on horse and rider. Three miles! In amongst a crowd of panic-stricken refugees—so they staggered into Ypres and collapsed at the very door of H.Q.

"And all I remember is, friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground."

The message was delivered and the situation was saved. The padre they carried into the house, where he dropped into a heavy sleep, awaking fit and well six hours later.

And now this awful work was nearing the climax, for the enemy had still to make their supreme effort. Yet, in God's name, what more was there that they could do?

More than half of the 7th Division had been wiped out already. The First Corps were in little better plight. One man to every seven yards of front, was it not? That was less than a week ago. Now it was one man to every twenty yards, at least down part of the line. There they lay in their pitiful cover, naked to the storm, rifles still to shoulder, blinded and deafened, in a stupor of utter exhaustion. Officers, staggering along the line, tried to awaken them. It seemed useless. A Force mightier than the Germans had supervened.

But the cavalry and infantry still held on.

# XVIII

## THE LAST STAND OF THE OLD ARMY

K. Hen. *O God of battles! steel my soldiers' hearts;*
*Possess them not with fear; take from them now*
*The sense of reckoning, if the opposed numbers*
*Pluck their hearts from them!*

On this day of St. Crispin (October 25) the salient directly to the east of Ypres was held by the First Corps, the 7th Division and the Cavalry Division. To the south came Allenby's cavalry and then the Third Corps. To the north of Ypres was the Ninth French Corps and then French Territorials and Belgians up to the coast.

From the previous chapter you have, I hope, gained some impression of the condition of the British Force. All that I have said about the heavy losses of the 7th Division came gradually to apply to Sir Douglas Haig's corps. For the week following upon their arrival from the Aisne they, too, had to suffer as their comrades had done. And when, at last, the climax was reached on October 31st, the First Corps found itself fighting in a condition no whit better than that of the 7th Division.

Whatever may be said of the heroism of the French and Belgians to the north—and that fine

story is yet to be told—there is no shadow of doubt that it was against the defenders of the Ypres salient that the Germans directed their mightiest efforts.

And now at the very moment when Germany was about to hurl the flower of her army against the meagre British line, when the enemy purposed to turn every available gun of an overwhelming strength upon the handful of men who dared to oppose his will, there happened an event as dramatic and momentous, surely, as any in the war.

To realise the significance of it you must first bear carefully in mind all that your imagination can picture of this desperate battle against odds; and then understand that a field battery of six guns, firing on an average 700 shells per day, was even then firing all too little for the needs of the moment.

Then learn that on this day the order was issued that every field gun in the Force must be placed on a *daily allowance of ten shells only!* In other words, a battery was allowed each day 60 shells to fire when 700 was not sufficient.

What the gunners said and what the infantry thought I leave you to guess. But I would also have you think of the high moral courage of the Commander-in-Chief who, upon the urgent representation of the Q.M.G. (Sir William

Robertson), dared to issue such an order at one of the most critical moments of the world's history.

To put the matter very briefly, there were no more shells for the howitzers and eighteen-pounders in France, and the reserve at home was practically exhausted. It is probably no exaggeration to say that had we gone on firing at the old rate for another fortnight we should have had to "cease fire" altogether.

The courage of Sir John French's decision (if I may venture the comment) seems on a par with the one already noted when he dared to extend his line still farther north instead of supporting the battered 7th Division. By issuing the order about the shells he was able to build up at least something of a reserve to be used when any battery was faced with some supreme crisis. Though the price was very, very heavy, the situation was saved. Had he not dared to pay the price and to place once again his perfect trust in his indomitable infantry and cavalry, who shall say what the end might have been?

And it is well that the world should hear of this, for surely it throws another and a still stronger light upon the heroism of the first Seven Divisions during those fateful days. And will the German Staff ever dare to tell the German people how their armies could not break through even then? I think not.

On Wednesday, the 28th, there were but few attacks made, and the enemy's guns were almost idle. It was, however, but that solemn, deathly silence which seems to brood over an Eastern sea before the breaking of the typhoon. You may picture German G.H.Q., where William Hohenzollern is present in person, sending out through their admirable organisation the final orders for the great assault. You can see the officers and men of every unit making their last preparations, nerving themselves for a fight the issue of which cannot to them have been a moment in doubt.

Would you compare the two armies? Turn, then, to Shakespeare's *Henry V.* and read once again the fourth act, from the prologue to the closing scene. There shall you find it all set down in matchless verse. Here I can add nothing to that picture of genius.

At daybreak on the 29th the storm burst. Heralded by a whirlwind of shells of every size, the German infantry charged down upon the devoted remnants of the First Corps, the 7th Division, and the Cavalry.

And just as the tidal wave tears from the rocks the seaweed and limpet clinging fast, so was the 1st Division torn from its trenches and hurled back, gasping and blinded.

A moment's pause, the battalions turned,

and, with the 2nd Division, crashed back again in a counter-attack.

A second time were the British forced back; a second time they recovered their ground. And so the fight swayed backwards and forwards. "Blinded, bloody and torn they reeled," but ever they won back again. And the enemy drew off, swearing that their spies had played them false, that there were two army corps facing them where they had thought it to be a division only.

"Another gap," they cried. "Take the break to the south where the Cavalry are."

So another corps threw themselves at the men of the 7th Division. And the British cavalry, shattered remnants of two brigades, stood to it. Such was the weight of the enemy's gunnery that one troop of them was buried alive. The rest, o'erborne like the 1st Division, were thrust slowly back, struggling with impotent arms against the wave of Germans.

Back they went, clinging fast to every point of vantage—rallying, charging, and back again. An infantry battalion, close by, sees their plight and dashes straight at the Germans in a counter-charge. One skeleton of a battalion against eight German battalions! And that little one beat them, routed them; two score prisoners it took, ten score dead the Germans left behind.

Again and again the Germans charged; and the day passed into night—a night of blood-red

flame and smoke. And still the British held the line. And ever the Germans drew back with their dying and their shame.

The blood-red night melted into a cold, grey dawn, and with the first hint of daylight the German gunners were at work again.

Now the British battalions are but little companies. The line which they have held is no more a line; but here and there are little groups of ghosts.

The Bavarians *must* capture Ypres. The "War Lord" is with them, and he commands. Therefore it must be.

And the ghosts of men who have said "No" through the last ten days of hell say "No" once again. It shall not be.

So the Bavarians came on and the British Infantry and the British Cavalry met them as they came.

In fair shock of battle they met. And they fought together as men have never fought before. Never at such odds have men fought. And the daylight drifted into darkness again.

All down the line the battle swayed this way and that. Here is a general in command of two companies of infantry; here a corporal acting as a battery commander—a battery of two guns. There is a junior subaltern leading his battalion in a desperate charge—a battalion of a hundred men. Every man is in. Here are cooks,

grooms, officers' servants from a Gunner battery lining up with picks and shovels, branches of trees, or bare fists. Why, in Heaven's name? To hold up and repulse half an advancing brigade.

"God of battles, was ever a battle like this in the world before?"

So wide was one of the gaps in the British line that a German Corps had actually succeeded in marching through and taking up a position immediately to the flanks and rear of some half dozen of the skeleton battalions.

Then it was that these devoted regiments suddenly found themselves assailed, as it seemed, by their own comrades, for who save British should be behind them? Through the fog-laden, rain-soddened air the deadly streams of machine-gun bullets tore through their ranks. And as the British crouched low and tried to peer into the mist to see how they should reply a Field Battery of ours poured its shells into the mêlée, unfortunately striking down several of our own men.

Who can tell the delirium of the hours that followed! The enemy to the front, to the rear, to the flank. A German Reserve Corps against the remnants of six British battalions, the men worn to a shadow by exposure, want of sleep, want of food. And yet they fought on. Now one battalion is gone, destroyed. A second has

150 men left out of 650, four officers out of sixteen. A third no officers and but a handful of junior N.C.O.'s to lead. And yet they fought on.

The slaughter of it all seems to pass human understanding. You hear of one single British company so surrounded by the enemy that the Germans did not even know it was there in the midst of them. And you hear of those few men within five minutes annihilating a German battalion, accounting for more than 800 of the strength. And still the enemy pour their masses into the battle.

You hear of the last remaining gun of a battery being brought into action on a road and fighting a duel at 500 yards range with a German field gun, knocking it out at last by a direct hit. Of a lance-corporal sitting in a shell-hole with a machine-gun firing methodically for an hour or more into the enemy ranks before they discover him—so mad is the confusion.

And how do they fare in Ypres and Hooge, where the Divisional and Corps H.Q. are? Of what are the Army Chiefs thinking? Within three or four miles of the battle, sharing, too, in the storm of shell, there is never a hint of disaster. The Staff go about their work as though the operations were fifty miles away.

The next evening there sped out of Ypres a dispatch-rider. One of those cheery souls he

was who had come over with his motor-bicycle straight from a public school, all for the "fun of the thing." And what a record of gallantry, endurance and cheeriness under all hardships have those youngsters created.

"Carrying dispatches and messages at all hours of the day and night in every kind of weather, and often traversing bad roads blocked with transport, they have been conspicuously successful in maintaining an extraordinary degree of efficiency in the service of communications." That is the tribute of the Commander-in-Chief.

So Stanmore rode up and delivered his message.

"How are things going?" said I. "And how are you getting on?"

"Having a simply ripping time," said Stanmore, chuckling all over. "You never saw such fun as it was yesterday."

(This was some of the fighting I have just been telling about.)

"Oh," said I, "what was it?"

Stanmore sat down on a bench and nearly choked with laughing at his recollections.

"Had to get a message through to 1st Corps H.Q. at Hooge. Wipers! You ought to have seen Wipers.[1] It was too funny. Not a soul

[1] I think Stanmore was mistaken in the name of the place. Ypres was not in this condition at the time.—AUTHOR.

in the streets, every other house in the place burning like mad, and shell pouring in all over the shop. I had to get off and wheel the bike because there wasn't any road left. Great shell-holes you could bury a 'bus in, and all the rest broken bricks and glass. It was a mess. One place I *actually had to pull up* because one of those Black Marias came along, took away the whole of a front of a house, went clean through and smashed into the house opposite. (Fits of laughter.) It was too silly to see all the floors and furniture just like a doll's-house. Dead horses and dogs and cats flying about. Two cats just missed me as they fell off a roof. A harlequinade wasn't in it. I simply rolled into a doorway and laughed till I could hardly see. Of course, H.Q. had been shelled out long ago, so no wonder I couldn't find the blessed place. Ran 'em to earth a bit later. Had the devil of a job getting back climbing over the ruins, and just as I was getting out of the town—oh, lord, you would have laughed—a big shell plumped down about 100 yards in front, and right out of the dust and smoke came one of our chaps wheeling his bike. The silly blighter had been and got a puncture." (Complete collapse of Stanmore.)

What German army, I ask you, is going to contend against a spirit like that?

But it was a few days later that Stanmore

brought the most delicious piece of news. Several of the Staff of the 2nd Corps, being apparently bored with life and inaction (think of it!) had actually gone off to London on 48 hours' leave!

Leave, in the middle of all that fighting! It was really too gorgeous. And how mad the Germans would have been had they known.

Of course, one did not know then that the greater part of the 2nd Corps, being absolutely exhausted, had been withdrawn from the firing-line. Nor could one foresee that officers and men on active service were going to be given occasional home leave. At that time such an idea was incredible. In fact, when, about Christmas, a certain number of officers were told they might go back to England for 96 hours, several declined the leave, saying that they preferred to stay and see the business through. So convinced was everyone that two or three months at most would bring the end of the war. And of the officers who took the leave one at least returned before the 96 hours were up, being unable to bear the seeming apathy and ignorance of those at home.

The third day of the great battle for Ypres had dawned. The 7th Division no longer existed as a Command, and the heroic remnant had been placed under the orders of Sir Douglas

Haig. Yet there could be no withdrawal of the men, for there was none to replace them. The line must still be held. Or if it can no longer be held, the Germans shall advance only over the English dead.

Once more came the whirlwind of shells; once more the blue-grey masses of the Germans swept down upon the defenders. At every point of the defence they struck. To the north where the 1st Division clung on grimly; at the 2nd Division, the 7th, the Cavalry, and to the south at Messines, and where Pulteney's 3rd Corps fought.

Once again the 1st Division was swept back. And now as the very heavens seemed to rend apart with sheeted flame and pour down their deluge of thunderbolts, as the ground beneath rocked and heaved to the mighty concussion, so it seemed that exhausted nature at last snapped and broke and men went mad with the shock and horror of it.

The British were swept back, but some remained, remained to be clubbed down or trampled underfoot by the storming wave. The discipline which they had learned kept them there to the last, crouching in the pitted ground, but the brain of them had gone and left them helpless and unconscious, gibbering with unholy laughter.

"At all costs the line must be held," cried Sir Douglas Haig. And with the inspiration of

their leader the Division rallied. Once again the enemy advance was checked.

All down the salient and far to the south one British group of men after another (we cannot say battalions or companies) was hurled back; to rally and counter-charge, check and repulse the enemy. But, ah, the terrible price which must be paid for it!

Hour after hour passed and the issue still swung in the balance. Shortly after noon German shells crashed into the Headquarters of the 1st and 2nd Divisions, the brain centres of the Corps. The General Officers commanding the Divisions were both put out of action, General Lomax wounded, General Monro unconscious; three Staff Officers of the 1st and three of the 2nd were all killed.

Within half an hour Sir John French was on the spot with Sir Douglas Haig. But nothing more could be done. The issue was in the hands of God.

From two to three o'clock the suspense was unbearable. It was the most critical moment in the whole battle, indeed since Mons, Sir John French has said.

You may picture those two men, the Field-Marshal and the General standing quietly by the great map spread on the table of the battered château: you see the Staff going quietly about their work; and if the strain is telling you must

needs look close into the eyes to detect it. There is nothing more to be done. Not even may any unit be withdrawn and thrust into another corner of the line. If the breach is made there can be no repairing. The seacoast and ports will be lost to us.

Slowly the minutes pass. A quarter past two.—Twenty past.—Half-past.——Are they holding still?

Suddenly over the wires comes the message, "The 1st and 2nd Divisions are *attacking* the German right."

General Landon, who, at a moment's notice, has taken over the command of General Lomax, is making the supreme effort.

The minutes pass.

Then, "German right being pushed back fast." Then, "Gheluvelt retaken—bayonet charge."

Is the tide turning? Can they do it?

Swiftly now come the messages. The left of the 7th Division is *attacking*. The 7th Division! Do you hear that? And they are *attacking*.

This retaking of Gheluvelt sets free some of the Cavalry, the 6th Brigade, which has shared throughout in the glory of the 7th Division. Sir Douglas Haig seizes the chance on the moment, and the order is at once flashed to the Brigade Commander.

The squadron leaders (what matter the names of the regiments—they are of the 7th Division!) rub their eyes in astonishment. "Boot and saddle"? Horses? They must be crazy at H.Q.! But there is the order. "Get to it, lads!"

The lads get at their horses where they can, and the horses are as amazed as their masters. "This is a joke. Another ruddy route-march!" But even a route-march is better than nothing.

"And where on earth have you been all these years?" say the horses, as they nuzzle for carrots.

"Sorry, old lady," says Trooper Tomkins. "Couldn't help it. Another job on. And a pretty——one, too. But we're for it now. *Get up!*" And in goes the bit, on goes the saddle.

"Hurry up, boys," sing out squadron commanders; "not a moment to lose."

Squadrons fall in, some mounted, some on foot. And off they go hell-for-leather straight into the torn and tattered woods where the Germans lurk.

What a round up! "In at them, boys: get to it!" Horses crash and cannon off broken tree trunks in the headlong race; men on foot come smashing through the undergrowth, firing wildly from hip or shoulder as the Germans bolt from cover to cover. Clean through the wood they go; nothing can stop the amazing charge.

Through the woods and out into the open again. On, on!

"It's Berlin this time, anyhow," gasps Trooper Tomkins.

At last they pull up as they throw themselves into a gap in the infantry line.

"Cheer-oh," says Private Williams as Tomkins drops down by his side. "'Ad a bit of a beano, 'aven't you?"

"Not 'alf," says Tomkins.

By the late afternoon the British had won back almost all of their original positions, and before midnight "the line as held in the morning had practically been reoccupied."

Just after the tide had turned, at 5.0 p.m., a French Cavalry Brigade got up to Hooge and pushed forward, dismounted, to the help of the Life Guards and Horse Guards.

And now turn to this little paragraph from Sir John French's dispatch:

"During the night touch was restored between the right of the 7th Division and left of the 2nd Brigade, and the Cavalry were withdrawn into reserve, *the services of the French Cavalry being dispensed with.*

Who can resist a thrill of ineffable pride in reading that last sentence? Hard set themselves, our gallant Allies had done all they could to send in time the needed support. Every-

where possible—a regiment here, a squadron there—they had given through those days of crisis; but the strong, solid reinforcement which would have meant so much was beyond their power until later.

No, it had been a square fight between British and German, and the British Commander-in-Chief was determined that once the tide had turned the day should be to his men alone. So I read it.

The day was won, the crisis was safely passed. But the cost of it in human lives and suffering had been a terrible one. The flower of England's chivalry, her knights and yeomen had perished. The Old Regular Army had fought its last fight—the last, the greatest of all. And it was in the noblest cause for which England has ever sent forth her sons.

Of the 7th Division, less than one month before there had sailed from England 400 officers. Forty-four returned. Their men had numbered 12,000. There were left 2,336.

"We thought," said a German officer, "that you had four Army Corps against us there."

In every Division the tale was almost as heavy. The 1st Division and the 2nd Division lost nearly three-fourths of their strength. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions each lost a half.

Forty thousand men is the loss which they

say the British suffered. Of the Germans there fell perhaps 250,000.

That it was a victory, and a decisive victory for our arms there can surely be no doubt. The Germans set out to achieve a definite object: they failed. The British determined to defeat that scheme: they succeeded. How the enemy failed, though massing against the defenders such overwhelming strength, we cannot say. And yet may we not cry in all reverence—

> "O God, Thy arm was here;
> And not to us, but to Thy arm alone,
> Ascribe we all!—When, without stratagem,
> But in plain shock and even play of battle,
> Was ever known so great and little loss
> On one part and on the other?—Take it, God,
> For it is none but Thine!"

*And England never knew.*

* * * * *

There I leave the narrative. Much more might be told of the days that followed; of the stern fight waged unceasingly through November and December; of the attacks by the Prussian Guard; of the misery of that first awful winter in the trenches, when men lived and fought waist-deep in icy water and freezing mud; of the incredible cheerfulness, the unconquerable gaiety which met and overcame every hardship.

But the Last Stand of the Old Army is a

fitting end. From now onwards the magnificent fighting qualities of the Territorial and New Army units were thrown into the scale, and the remnant of the Old Army, with the splendour of its traditions and the inspiration of its record, became the heart centre of the Army of a People.

There is in England to-day not a family which does not mourn the irretrievable loss of its own manhood—a son, it may be, the last of the line; a husband; a brother; a lover; a dear friend.

Many there are whose loved ones fought and died during those first four months of this great War of Liberation. They have, perhaps, no trinket of ribboned cross or order to show, to hold out and exclaim with tears of pride: "This my beloved won on such and such a day."

And yet, did they but understand, theirs is a treasure far more precious than any ribboned trinket, any so-called "honour." It is the treasure of a memory that he was ready to serve England when England called; ready to give all that he had to give at Her demand. Had it not been so his name would not now be emblazoned upon the Scroll of Honour amongst those of the men who fought at Mons, at the Aisne, at Ypres.

Whatever his motive—a love of adventure, an impatience with the trivial things of everyday life, a desire, perhaps, to wipe out some past misdeed—whatever it may have been, he was ready. And so to him there befell the proudest

lot which a man may know—to die on the field of honour. Nay, more than this: to die in the company of such men as those who faced the fearful odds of the opening months of this War.

For what prouder thing can a woman say to-day than: "My husband, my son, was one of those who held the Ypres gate with the Old Army," or "He was one of the old 'Contemptibles'"?

There, indeed, is the honour. And the memory of it, though locked deep in the heart that no man may see, is dearer far than any decoration that the Sovereign may bestow. For all who so fought are worthy of the bestowal.

And, oh! may England never, never forget the debt she owes to those of her sons who fought for her then! For with the passing years the memory grows dim, and in times that are gone our people have sometimes forgotten.

But to-day it is the Nation which fights, and it is the People who shall see that justice is done. Justice and generosity to the living; justice and generosity to the dead and to their loved ones who once leaned upon them.

The great fight for Freedom is not yet won. For weary months—for years, perhaps—the bloody shadow of war may darken the world. But the end, and triumph, is certain if England and her Allies will, with all their heart and soul,

but dedicate themselves to the unfinished work which their honoured dead "have thus far so nobly advanced."

And when at last the Morning of a new life has dawned upon the World; when the day is set for the Kings and Captains of the People humbly to kneel with the Nation before the throne of the Great Protector of the Universe and there to offer up their prayers of Thanksgiving—then, too, let England remember.

For in that mighty concourse shall a place be set apart—a place of the highest honour that all men may see, and seeing may remember—"That few, that happy few, that band of brothers."

So to a deathly silence shall the cheering die away. And through the silence, with dim, phantasmal tread, there shall pass the muster of the men who died. But first of that great army of Shadows to pass to the place of honour set for them shall march the immortal souls of those who, in 1914, saved England, who saved the World from the bondage of Hell.

Who shall sing the Song of them,
The wonder and the strength of them,
The gaiety and tenderness
They bore across the sea?
In every heart's the Song of them,
The debt that England owes to them,
The chivalry and fearlessness
That strove—and won Her free.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

**With Some Observations upon a Subject of Importance**

SEEING that comparatively few persons trouble to read any "preface" which a book may carry I am placing this particular one at the end of the volume instead of at the beginning so as not to interfere with a direct plunge into the narrative. Yet a preface may upon occasion serve a useful purpose, even though it be written for the satisfaction of the author rather than for the enlightenment of the reader. This one will, I hope, serve both ends.

Firstly, then, it seems well to explain that the design of this book differs, deliberately, from that of the former volume, "The Retreat from Mons." This for two reasons. When "The Retreat" was written no account of that episode, embracing an outline of the military operations with an estimate of the more human side of the achievement, had been published. So the story was told upon those lines. And as it was an episode definite in itself, possessing also a clear-cut, artistic unity, the story was not a difficult one to tell.

But when the tide turned and one came to

deal with an enormous battle-front and ever-increasing numbers the artistic unity vanished. Also it became impossible to combine a clear survey of the operations with the story of human endeavour—the spirit of the enterprise. The British public cares little enough about the former, but does wish to hear of the latter. And as my war work is, for the most part, concerned with the great majority rather than with the small minority, my choice of theme was at once decided. Besides, two or three admirable accounts of the military operations have been published, and there will be more to follow.

My idea, then, was to try to supplement these histories by a personal suggestion of what those months of September and October, 1914, looked like to the men of the Old Army. To set down a series of impressions gleaned from the very heart of those big happenings; impressions of events which stand out in one's mind like trees upon a skyline. The titles to the chapters will show how I went to work.

That was my original idea, and having little more than that in mind I was strongly averse from the compiling of such a book. It would lack, I felt, the great essential of every art-work. However, upon certain urgent representations, I began the writing. And, as I wrote, the form and purpose of the work became more clear. If I have succeeded in the task the

nature of that purpose will be apparent: if I have failed the purpose matters not.

I should like it that this volume may be read as a companion to the previous one. Partly because it is a continuation of the narrative, although in a different form, but more particularly because several of the descriptions in "The Retreat" apply to similar situations in this volume: the German massed attacks, for instance.

One other point. It will be found that the chapters, or "Impressions" as I should prefer to call them, are as nearly as possible in order of time, keeping to the sequence of the military operations.

There is very little in this book, so far as incidents are concerned, which has not been a matter of personal observation or deduction. But there are some acknowledgments not already made in the text which I must make here.

To the genius of William Shakespeare I owe perhaps the greatest debt of all. His nobly patriotic and prophetic play, *Henry V.*, has not only helped to inspire my narrative, but from this play alone I have once again collected the little gems of thought and expression which I have threaded upon my story like pearls upon a cord.

In Chapter VI I have quoted from two

poems by Miss C. A. Renshaw, taken from her recently published volume, "England's Boys" (Erskine Macdonald). Of contemporary authors of military works I am indebted for occasional reference and verification of facts to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ("The British Campaign in France and Flanders"), and to Lieut.-Colonel John Buchan ("Nelson's History of the War"). Through the courtesy of Lady Helen Forbes I am indebted to Major Ian Forbes, Royal Scots Fusiliers, for the outlines of one or two incidents included in Chapters XVII and XVIII: while Lieut.-General Sir David Henderson very kindly gave me some of the details which I have included in Chapter VI. Apart from the above, and one or two official publications, I have, of necessity, been compelled to write away from any library of reference. Nor have I any collection of "personal narratives" from which to draw.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Lieut.-Colonel Brindsley Fitzgerald for the care with which he has read my narrative in order to ensure its accuracy, and for making several suggestions, all of which I have adopted.

I must also express my thanks to Captain C. T. Atkinson, who has once again helped me with the Roll of Honour; and to Mr. J. H. Hartley, for embodying my suggestions in his spirited picture cover.

Of the hideous and brutal side of the war I have tried to write with as much reticence as possible. Similarly on the subject of German Atrocities. No description, however vivid the writing may be, no pictures no photographs can ever bring the facts home to people who have not actually suffered. And yet I am interested to find that no passage in the earlier volume has been more widely quoted in the Allied and neutral countries than the one which described the mutilation of a little child. I only hope that the incidents described in this volume under the heading "Kultur" (Chapter III) may become as widely known.

"There should be no false, vapid sentiment in refusing to think about these things." If I may be allowed to repeat myself: "There should not be a home in the British Empire where the facts of German atrocities are not known, and where, in realising them, hearts are not nerved to yield their last drop of blood in stamping out from the world of men the hideous Thing which has done them."

And there is no human brain that can conceive the nameless things which those monsters of infamy would do to English women and children if opportunity once served. Yet, today in England there are very many towns and villages where soldiers in training are regarded as interlopers, as interfering with business or

disturbing the fair peace of the countryside. Or if not as interlopers then as fit subjects for robbery and extortion on the part of tradesmen, lodging-house keepers and others. This is a shameful thing, so that one comes to exclaim, "Is it for such men and women as these that our sailors and soldiers are fighting?"

* * * * *

The root of this and similar ignorance is, of course, the lack of Education, of Enlightenment in War Facts and Ideas. The Public generally are kept in ignorance of the course of events, or are misled by false optimism on the part of their responsible advisers, or are unable to appraise events at their real value. With the existence of a properly co-ordinated system of Enlightenment these failings would be minimised.

A case in point was that of the first announcement of the Battle of Jutland Bank. On the Saturday when the first official intimation was published (a tale of disaster, it will be remembered) it chanced that I was in a great industrial city of the Midlands. It did not need five minutes to realise that the real truth was being withheld, and that the report would have the most mischievous effect on the public. There was little I could do to counteract it, but that little I did, and it proved effective so far as that district was concerned. I at once tele-

phoned to the managers of the theatres and music-halls of the city and obtained a very cordial assent to address their audiences for ten minutes at each performance. Thus I was enabled to get directly at several thousand people of a big centre, to suggest to them the real facts, and to revive in them a faith which the morning's announcement had badly shaken.

M. Sarraut, Minister of Public Instruction in France, has put the case for Enlightenment in a few admirable words:

"Education," he says, "is a special personal means of seconding the efforts of our Armies. Its rôle is, indeed, so to act that the entire Country shall know why it is fighting—for what past, for what future, for what facts, for what ideas; and thus, by informing national opinion with this knowledge, to maintain and strengthen the Country in its unshakable confidence in, and its desire for complete victory."

In a scheme such as this one has to hammer for a long time at the doors of an unimaginative officialdom before they are opened. And the reference to personal work in this direction will, I trust, be forgiven, for it is only made to indicate what might be done. For two years now, since July, 1915, I have been hammering at those doors. At that time a comprehensive scheme was submitted to each individual member of the then Government, and it was backed

up with cordiality by every responsible journal (save one) in the Kingdom. You will find the scheme outlined in the *English Review* of November, 1915. Some measure of success has been won, but this is infinitesimal compared with what might be done.

Take the work of the Navy, for instance. It is the one subject above all else which appeals to our Nation. They have the tang of the sea, the centuries-old tradition of an island race in their very blood. They love to hear what their sailors are doing and how the Grand Fleet does its work. The ignorance upon the most elementary facts is simply astounding. It is an ignorance which militates seriously against national effort. If one man, working unofficially and in his spare time, can give in a winter season seventy-six "popular" recitals on the work of the Navy and so bring the facts home to thousands of the general public and the troops, what might not be done under a carefully organised scheme?

Besides, apart from other considerations, the Public ought to know. It is their right. Our Navy, like our Army, is not a race apart. It is Us, our flesh and blood, a part of one big family. We are all working together to one common end. We cannot work together with the whole-hearted enthusiasm which the Cause demands if one half of us is kept in ignorance

of what the other half is doing. And, be it noted, the ignorant half is the one which supplies the "sinews of war."

I would particularly emphasise the need for a comprehensive organisation, because it is a project which necessarily demands such detailed and thorough methods and a man endowed with a practical imagination to direct them. To attempt a "muddling through" policy is futile.

As I write there has just been constituted a "War Aims Committee," designed to keep before the Public the ideals for which we are fighting. The idea, so far as it goes, is excellent, and the Committee, with its staff of helpers, will, I am sure, do excellent work. But it is only one more example of our traditional method of tinkering at a job by fits and starts instead of tackling the real project as a whole, visualising it in its entirety and getting a grip on to it. Incidentally, the work of this Committee will everywhere be recognised as being of an "official" nature. Any propaganda which bears such a mark can only be moderately successful.

Now here is another example of the practical effect of propaganda work. A well-known Member of Parliament, but a man of the People, and incidentally an admirable "popular" lecturer, went down to a great engineering works to lecture on "Trawlers and Mine-

Sweeping." For this he received a trifling fee. A week later the Managing Director wrote to him to this effect:

"If we had paid you a fee five times as large we should still regard it as the finest investment we have ever made. Since your talk to our employees the *quality and output of their work have gone up twenty-five per cent.*"

No one, of course, would have anything revealed the knowledge of which might help the enemy. (All this has been said so often.) But while our People are remarkably patient, they have long since come to view with suspicion the official statement that such and such a fact has not been published because it would give the enemy information. On the other hand, when the First Lord of the Admiralty, in response to the strong popular demand for information upon the number of German submarines sunk, very frankly stated the precise reasons why the figures could not be given everybody immediately understood, and there was an end of the matter. The Public must be told the facts; or if the facts may not be told the reason why must be plainly stated. That is the long and short of it. This is a War of Peoples and Principles, not of professional Armies.

It is to me so incredible that after three years of War, during which the Nation has risen to such splendid heights of self-denial, sacrifice

and calmness under adversity, the People should not be considered worthy of confidence and trust. I can as readily understand the curious mentality of the German rulers. It is not merely wrong, it is worse—it is foolish.

It is foolish because every hour we are drawing nearer to a crisis when the People are going to speak, and with no uncertain voice. And unless the facts are perfectly clear in their minds there may follow disaster.

The public comments and demands consequent upon the humiliating air-raid over London on July 7, 1917, indicated very forcibly how public agitation might develop. It will be remembered, too, that that raid followed directly upon the revelations of the Mesopotamian débâcle. Public confidence in the Government was shaken to its depths. The People, in their magnificent loyalty, must be trusted. If there is a feeling that that loyalty is misplaced they will certainly demand a complete reconstruction—and they will secure it.

Keep the People informed and you keep them inspired. It is the one factor most needed to ensure that the national effort shall be kept tuned up to concert pitch.

"There comes a time in every war," Sir William Robertson has said, "when the strain is heavier every day, is almost intolerable, and when a little extra effort will suffice to turn the

scale. That time is coming now; and in this war, as in all others, victory will incline to that side which can best preserve the cohesion and courage and endurance of the nation."

Nor is it the mere publication of facts which is in question. There is also the necessity for presenting them to the public so that those who read may understand; the need for intelligent criticism and comment on the part of the Press. We have always been proud of the freedom which our Press has enjoyed in the past, and to it we can trace the working of many a reform. But if this freedom of discussion is denied or stifled the People immediately find themselves living in a world of suspicion and rumour. Not only are the Public shackled, but the Government also. For it is upon the Press that the Government depends in great measure for a faithful reflection of public opinion.

There is also a very large section of the community which seldom reads a newspaper; men and women whose estimate of public affairs is generally derived from headlines and catch phrases. These, too, must be adequately catered for—and they were provided for in the scheme.

With one or two notable exceptions publicity schemes during the past have failed because (so it seems to me) they have been too academic. There has been no real attempt to

force an entrance into the heart and mind of the big Public. It has been like sending a University Extension lecturer to talk to the huge popular audience which nightly crowds to see a Lyceum melodrama. Apart from such a man as the present Premier, Lloyd George, those who have proved the most successful in propaganda work, recruiting and the like during the past three years, have been men like Horatio Bottomley, George Robey and Harry Lauder. Neither Robey nor Lauder is an orator, as one understands the term, but they do know how to grip a popular audience from the first moment of their appearance on the platform, and they know, from long experience, exactly what tells with such an audience.

If you want to get the Facts and Ideas of this War of Liberation home to the British Public you must be ready to compete with the cheap novel, the music-hall and picture-palace, and to beat them on their own ground.

Emphatically you do not require politicians for such work. Propaganda, as I have suggested, is most effective when it is carefully disguised. The man in the street shies violently at the mere suggestion of education. But administer your dose like the powder in a spoonful of jam, and it will readily be swallowed. Here is an instance of one piece of propaganda work which has proved particularly effective.

In November, 1916, a certain well-known composer published a spirited and simple musical setting of a stirring ballad on "The Battle of Jutland Bank." He did so in order that the general public might learn the facts of that naval victory of ours. It was placed on the market at twopence a copy, all profits going to Naval War Charities. To-day that song, taken up by the L.C.C. and other Educational Authorities, is being sung in schools throughout the Empire; it has won to popularity in the Fleet and in the Army, especially amongst the Overseas Troops; and it will undoubtedly in the future find a place of honour amongst those songs of the sea which we all love so well. Thus the song is helping to inspire the younger generation; and thousands of men and women are learning for the first time of the gallantry and work of our sailors in that particular battle.

The above is but a trifling incident, but it will perhaps suggest other useful methods in an organised scheme; also my meaning in advocating that a man of practical imagination, with broad human sympathies and a general knowledge in catering for popular entertainment, is the right kind of man to direct the organisation.

Take, for instance, the most obvious medium of enlightenment—"popular" lectures. There are very few men and women in the country—twenty, thirty, shall we say?—who can do such

entertaining work on war topics with success. But no attempt has yet been made to utilise the services even of these persons, when a trifling subsidy of a guinea per lecture would have secured them. Further, the man who for years past has directed the only Lecture Agency in the country, and who knows more about such work than any man in the Kingdom, has never been invited to help the Government. Oh, yes, his name has been brought to official notice at least twice.

On the other hand, propaganda in Allied and neutral countries is really being conducted with success. But for propaganda at home—where it is most needed—there is no money and no real organisation. "We couldn't think of such a thing," says Officialdom; "there is no precedent for it."

Then there is the Drama, another admirable medium; sketches in the music-halls; telling films for the cinema houses; the issue of broadsheets by county newspapers to keep their readers informed of the deeds of the local regiments; the effective distribution in pamphlet form of "popular" war stories and articles by competent authors—but all these points were urged two years ago, and we still go on in the same old way, discouraging individual effort and refusing to allow an organised one. "There is no precedent!"

There is a strong feeling, which is growing in intensity, especially in the business and industrial circles of the Midlands and the North, that we are fast becoming lost in a maze of ideals without formulating any clear-cut policy of practical effort by which such ideals may be realised. After three years of appalling slaughter of human beings, and of colossal material destruction, we are still talking vaguely about the rights of democracy and the new life which is coming. But your hard-headed business man does not bother much about ideals, save indirectly. He wants to know where he stands. He wants a straight proposition at which he may work. Given that, he is ready to go on for another ten years if necessary.

We know in broad outline why we are fighting, and to what end. We have read the speeches of Mr. Asquith and President Wilson and half a score other leaders. We turn over on our tongues the sonorous phrases about "never sheathing the sword," or "the principles of civilisation and the liberties of Europe," and we are justly proud that such ideals should be ours. But there is a feeling abroad that the time has come when these ideals should be translated into the language of practical business.

"We intend to win this war," says, in effect, our old friend the man in the street, "but

we want the job over at the earliest possible moment. How many aeroplanes do you want? 20,000? Certainly, you shall have them. Anything else?"

That is the attitude of the nation. They have given a blank cheque to be filled in to any sum. But this "nation of shopkeepers" possesses business instincts, and it is not content to go on indefinitely under existing conditions.

Nor should this policy of Enlightenment be concerned only with current war facts and ideas. There are the details attending the conclusion of Peace, together with the system of demobilisation; and there are the projects to be taken in hand after the war. One may perhaps summarise the three under the words Inspiration, Realisation, Reconstruction. Under each heading a definite policy is demanded—so far as experience and human foresight can provide them. Each policy must be a national one, discussed and framed by the newly chosen representatives of the People. To this end a comprehensive scheme of Education is obviously essential in order that the facts may be clear for such discussion and decision. Under neither of the two last headings have any concrete proposals been published, and that is why I suggest that we are still groping in the fog of ideals.

Surely by now the Allied Governments have

formulated, at least in outline, the terms of Peace which they intend to dictate. I use the word *dictate* because in certain quarters there seems to be some idea that the Allies propose to "discuss" peace terms with the enemy. That, of course, is impossible. Let the terms be as just, as wise and as moderate as may be, but there will be no discussion save only amongst the Governments who will dictate them.

Again, under that same heading of Realisation, the people must be prepared for the process of demobilisation—of the armies, of the workers at home. It is surprising (and yet is it surprising?) how few persons realise what an intricate business that is going to be. An affair of years, perhaps.

Presumably some scheme is already in hand, with the actual details being gradually filled in. But the general public knows nothing about it, and if Peace were to come suddenly (as it probably will) there would be chaos unless the public knew what to expect.

Under the third heading, the process which has come to be known as Reconstruction, the points for discussion are endless. Agriculture, Town Planning, Emigration, work or provision for the war-disabled, and a hundred other themes. These quite apart from the determined attempt which must be made to secure a lasting World Peace and an end for ever of the hideous

slaughter of modern war. This generation will but initiate many of the schemes, but it is for us to see that the foundations are well and truly laid.

How and by whom is it all going to be done? Certainly not by men who are neither in touch with nor representative of the nation. The women, by the way, the leaders of their sex in this country, are just now far more closely in touch with the People than are the men.

But, so far as this Country is concerned, it will be done by men and women who are of the People and elected under a newly devised and equitable franchise. And that they may be worthily elected it is necessary that there should be a widespread knowledge and appreciation of the issues at stake. An appreciation, too, that England is but one nation in a great Brotherhood of Nations. For it is in this knowledge, and the use to which we put it, that our Future lies. This, and this only, so I believe, is the Security which we can build up, and upon which we can wholly rely, against the havoc of another such war of hate and aggression.

If we fail in that dissemination of knowledge, if we stumble blindly upon victory, then all that we have suffered, all the lessons taught by this newly revealed Brotherhood, all our individual sacrifices may have been in vain.

England will not win this war with honour to herself unless she wins as a nation. The national service we demand can never be given until the people see with eyes of understanding.

Let England, Great Britain if you will, look to herself as her comrade nations of Canada, Australia, South Africa and the others will look to themselves. Then, in the fullness of time, with enhanced right and pride, will she take her predestined place in that great Federation of Parliaments which we all look to as the aftermath of this glorious rally to our Standard, and of the Victory which that rally ensures.

A. Corbett-Smith.

London,
*September*, 1917.

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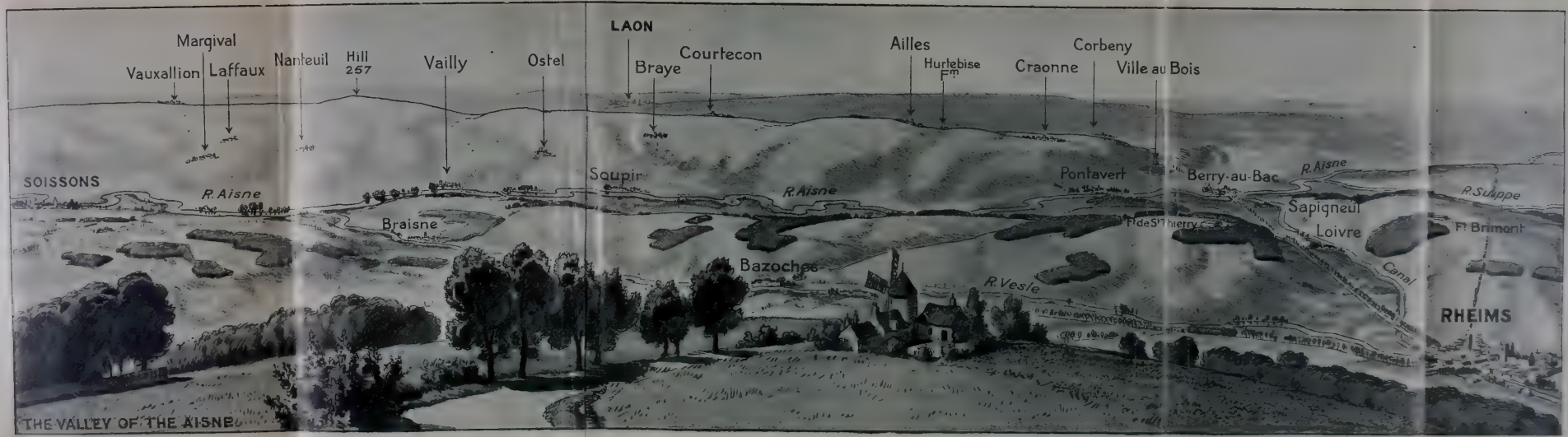


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